

TALE OF THREE CITIES

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A Novel in Baroque

By

D. L. MURRAY

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TO
PHILIP GUEDALLA
WHO
RESTORED THE SECOND EMPIRE

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PREFACE

IN this novel historical personages appear under their proper names ; when the name is fictitious it must be assumed that the character is fictitious too, though it may have taken traits from typical figures of the age. I wish particularly to emphasise that the descendants of the Beata Ludovica in the tale are a purely imaginary family, and that the friars in Book One bear no relation to the actual occupants a century ago of the historic Roman convents where they are placed. Throughout I have tried to give the substance and spirit of history truthfully, as I read it ; but I have taken the novelist's liberty to fill gaps with dramatic conjecture and make changes over minor details, among them the transference (on page 629) of the locality of one of the crimes of the Paris Commune from La Roquette to Montmartre.

Like every novel of the past this one is based on a mass of histories, biographies, memoirs and collections of personal and social gossip, and I could not acknowledge all my obligations. I should be ungrateful, however, if I did not make special mention of Stieler and Wey's Roman picture-books, and Doré's picture-book of London ; of Sala's "Twice Round the Clock," and that neglected classic, Mayhew's "London Labour and the London Poor," enshrining the dialect and customs of the Victorian showmen ; of Fleury and Sonolet's "Société du Second Empire," and J. Boulenger's monograph, "Les Tuileries sous le Second Empire" ; of G. Bapst's "Le Maréchal Canrobert," with its mass of diaries and eye-witnesses' accounts of the fighting of 1870 ; of Vizetelly's "My Adventures in The Commune," P. Dominique's "La Commune," and G. Bourgin's magnificent illustrated record of the same movement. Much of the background to this epoch is preserved as nowhere else in the pages of the French novelists of the naturalistic period, who indeed regarded themselves rather as social historians than as story-tellers. I have, of course, borrowed none of the fictional content of such works as Zola's "Les Rougon-Macquart," the Margueritte Brothers' "Une Époque," and the Goncourt Brothers' "Madame Gervaisais" ; but I gladly own what I have learned from them of the topography and usages of the time.

Lastly my thanks to four friends who have personally aided me. Professor Mario Praz of Rome put at my disposition his unique knowledge of First Empire art. M. Georges Girard spared time from his official duties to advise me on my researches in Paris. M. René Héron de Villefosse, the historian of Paris, whose father preserved the Louvre from the incendiaries of the Commune, consented to act as my guide among the relics of the Second Empire in the city. M. Georges Duveau developed for my benefit the information contained in his brilliant essay, "Le Siège de Paris." If these two last have already been called to the active service of France, may my hopes and good wishes accompany them!

D. L. M.



BOOK I

Little Brother

“ Or in Franciscan think to pass disguised.”
Milton.

CHAPTER ONE

BERNINI

(I)

ALL over Rome the bells were waking in the gold-washed translucency. In a drowsy disorder they mingled their voices, some hurrying forward, some lagging behind. Clear altos or thunderous basses, clangorous or mellow, confident in new-cast youth or sighing with memories, they stirred themselves with the ease of dwellers in a familiar temple to give the Angel's greeting to the February sunrise.

Inside, the little church by the bank of the Tiber was cold and still dark. The chapels were pools of gloom ; the High Altar, piled with gilt vases, paper flowers and twisted marble angels, was a fantasy of gesticulating shadows. Only in a side chapel to the left of the chancel two yellow stars trembled in the depths upon the altar. By their light could be seen, ghostly, the figure of a youth in the brown habit of the Franciscan friars who passed noiselessly to and fro preparing the altar for Mass.

His face was pale and hollow-cheeked, the eyelids creased, with shadows under the eyes. The long, melancholy mouth, drooping at the corners, was set in a rigid line of habitual repression. Yet the lay-brother Deodato, as he went about his tasks languidly and with a feeling as though his legs would not support him, was enjoying a few moments of relaxation in the gloom, in the soothing atmosphere of the church, blended of earthiness, the smell of stone and faint clings of incense. After that fearful night . . . yet another of them, there had been three in succession this week. . . he was thankful for his present numbness of feeling, for the sense of weakness, for the dulling of all interest in his surroundings, in his life, even in the fate of his soul. At moments the rough cloth of his habit brushed across the raw scars on his shoulders where he had frantically

lashed himself with the discipline a few hours since . . . it had then been only three o'clock of the endless night . . . but he did not wince or mind the stiffening feeling of the flesh.

It was quiet at least, his flesh, since he had stumbled down, shaking and panting, at the sound of the morning bell, into the vault-like serenity of the church. Oh! let him enjoy this tiny truce in the unending war in which defeat grew daily nearer, this *refrigerium*, like the little moments of relative coolness which the milder theologians sometimes hoped for the damned in Hell. It could not last . . . and he scarcely dared even to let his thoughts run forward, lest they should, like the rash word that unchains the avalanche, let loose the furies of the flesh again.

The church had grown lighter by the time he preceded the Father whose Mass he was to serve out of the sacristy, and returned towards the chapel where the candles were burning. Through the eastern windows a golden shaft was striking, which glinted on the gilding and the chubby, ivory-coloured cheeks of the angels on the High Altar—like friendly little dolls they seemed to Deodato in his present enfeebled mood—and fell in a dazzling sheet upon the marble floor beyond the balustrading of the sanctuary. But it was still twilight in the side-chapel when he knelt beside the priest and began to repeat with him the preparation for Mass.

Father Egidio bowed down and beat his breast. "I confess to God Almighty, to Blessed Mary ever-virgin, to Blessed Michael the Archangel, to Blessed John the Baptist, to the Holy Apostles Peter and Paul . . ." Ah! yes, he confessed! Deodato would in a moment repeat the confession in his turn—but what was the use? They would sin again, and ask to be forgiven again . . . but never, never, would he, Deodato, pluck the sting out of his flesh! Bowing down in his turn, he sought, with a convulsive straining of his tired mind, his exhausted body, to throw sincerity into his confession, to blind himself to his fears . . . to his certainty. He hung upon the wheezy whisper of the old friar repeating the Absolution, trying to hear through it the tones of a celestial voice; then once again numbness crept over him.

Father Egidio ascended to the altar, and his server rose and knelt on the corner of the step below him. The Mass continued while the shadows in the chapel began to thin and to reveal its outlines more clearly.

Just above the altar with its two flickering tapers there opened

out an alcove like a small bedchamber. The keen white light of the morning outside was brightening and extending its reflection through a western window into this mysterious room. Plainer and plainer there came into view, stretched on a couch of marble so tenderly carved as to show every crease of the mattress, each billow of the draperies, a veiled figure like a nun's. The nearest of the altar-candles made a primrose halo encircling a marble hand with long square-tipped fingers pressed quivering against its owner's bosom. During the rapid mutter of the Epistle Deodato gazed at this hand as if helpless to withdraw his eyes from it. There was the hand that could pity, that could console! He imagined it laid upon his forehead, the delicate strength of it penetrating those slim, square finger-tips—how swiftly it would heal, quell those torturing fires, dissolve the sullen lump into which his despairing heart had set! . . .

Suddenly he became conscious of a less selfish feeling. The hand, he realised, as often before, was wrung with its own pain. It too suffered; that was the rule of life—injustice! Loveliest, purest, kindest, it was not spared for that; and he, Deodato, luckless wretch, hollow shell of a man without strength or sensibility, he could do nothing to help . . . nothing . . . nothing!

Father Egidio had shuffled across to the Gospel side of the altar, and now stood looking round with surprise on the acolyte who had forgotten to change the book. Deodato staggered to his feet and ran round to place the missal under Father Egidio's spectacles. The old friar, with a smile of blameless amusement, crossed himself and announced the Gospel. They were grouped together now at the west end of the altar, and as Father Egidio reverentially mouthed the Latin sentences of the Gospel, the reflection of the mounting sun from the cloister grew stronger, until it seemed as though a gauze curtain had been silently rolled up within the chapel. Above the two heads, the tumbled coarse black curls of the youth, the ragged grey fringe round the tonsure of the aged friar, there shone out from between the marble folds of its veil the face of the holy woman of the sixteenth century, the Beata Ludovica.

Compared to the two faces below, the boy's ashy and extinguished, the old man's set in wrinkled routine, the marble was the one that lived. The small, full-lipped mouth, opened in a shudder of ecstasy, the straight nose with its palpitating nostrils, the curved lids fluttering over the swoon of the great, tender eyes, the level forehead where

peace seemed to sit enthroned, absorbed into themselves the whole sum of vitality in the chapel. They alone existed; beside were only shades.

Deodato the lay-brother knew by heart every line of Bernini's miracle in stone. For years he had never entered the church without stealing some glance at it. Very black was the mood in which it brought him no consolation—but the consolation was diverse and shot through with contending emotions. Always his heart swelled with the desire to give himself in love, but the meaning of this desire eluded his gropings. Sometimes, indeed, after long watching of the marble face, he would see the full lips quivering with the appeal of actual flesh, the fingers ready to entwine themselves in his, the breasts beneath the severe habit of the Franciscan Third Order stir with the enthrallment of life; and would recoil from the vision with the sting in his body again, cursing Satan and pressing his hands over his eyes. Yet this tumult in his frame was seldom long-lived, for as it wounded the statue brought healing, by the majesty of its beauty. Passion was overawed, and he seemed to be lifted to a height of universal love. Prayer broke from him like the fountain from the rock of Moses, and the rays of the Divine Presence for the moment lit the world.

At other times, when his emotions were less deeply stirred, the internal conflict less acute, he would stand fascinated by the art of the figure. His fingers would twitch as he pressed them into his waist-cord, to preserve monastic gravity, with the longing to reproduce himself the expression of the face, to model the sinews of the neck and hands, to catch the harmony of the broken line of draperies. Some lumps of clay in his cell had often been pressed by his spatulate brown fingers and thumbs into what he hoped would prove the likeness of the Beata Ludovica's hand, and contemptuously squeezed out flat again. . . . Yet at this moment there was another attempted copy of the hand on the table of the lay-brother's bare cell.

This morning the sudden apparition from the fleeing matutinal shadows of the face of the Beata had an extraordinary effect upon his over-taxed nerves. He could not stay the tears that streamed from his eyes, darkly blurring the brown stuff of his habit as with rain-drops, while he rang the bell for the Elevation and looked upward through a shining veil at the Host. He was free of struggle, lapped in peace, resting like a child on the indefinable presence and support that seemed to emanate from the statue. His flesh

was still; the vivid images of damnation had receded for a while. In a surge of unfeigned gratitude he cried his "Thanks be to God!" at the conclusion of the Mass.

(2)

In the same state of blessed passivity Deodato preceded the celebrant back to the sacristy through the tiny congregation that had collected in the chapel on this morning of a minor festival. An observer might have traced in the gathering the lineaments of the map of Europe as it stood then, in the winter of 1858. There were the usual four or five devout wives from the adjoining quarter of Trastevere, in their laced half-bodices and white kerchiefs, and one or two Roman women of the better class, with black veils on their heads. In a corner crouched a peasant from some campagna farm, shaggy as one of his own beasts in his sheep-skin jacket. Behind these had knelt and stood with a drilled precision a short row of seminarists from the Collegium de Propaganda Fide, members of the black-cassocked spiritual militia whose devotion did more than the weapons of the picturesque Papal Guards to uphold the throne of the Sovereign Pontiff, Pius IX. For still the intact States of the Church stretched from sea to sea across the middle part of Italy, dividing the ramshackle Kingdom of Naples from the crazy quilt of small Duchies bordering the domain of the Austrian Emperor. His whitecoats, in their turn, from their quadrilateral of Northern fortresses, held fast to Milan, Lombardy and Venice, and overawed the tiny kingdom of Piedmont, fiercely nursing in the shadows of the Alps its dream of one day heading a united Italy.

But the most striking figures in the Church of San Francesco this morning were a knot of French infantrymen, pious Bretons, in the baggy red trousers and blue *capotes* of the Line. What meaning, a visitor might have asked, had the presence of these foreign soldiers in Rome?

To that question the Liberals and Democrats of the time were ready with a blunt answer. The security of Europe, established on the basis of the Vienna Treaties after the Great War fought to overthrow the first Napoleon, had within the last few years been violently imperilled by an enigmatic upstart styling himself the nephew of the terrible Emperor—though even that claim was denied by his bitterer enemies.

For a long while this pretender had not been taken seriously. His ridiculous little chin-tuft was a godsend to the caricaturists, and his first essays in conspiracy, including an "invasion" of France with a handful of followers and a stuffed eagle on his arm, had seemed rather to betoken an eccentric mentality. But to-day no one laughed any longer at Louis Napoleon. Out of the revolutionary upheavals of 1848 he had risen on the geyser of a popular vote as President of the French Republic. Within three years, cynically breaking his oath to the constitution, he had in a bloody December week transformed his Presidency into a Dictatorship and piled the streets of Paris with the corpses of the friends of Democracy. The penal colonies of France were crammed with prisoners, the free countries of Europe crowded with refugees.

Since then he had set himself, with the implacable venom of one who had in his own person known both exile and prison, to the destruction of the settlement by which it had been hoped to keep for ever in bonds the military might of France. The very title he had taken when converting his Dictatorship into an Empire had been an insolent defiance of the Treaties; for by calling himself the Emperor Napoleon III he implied that Napoleon I's son, dead in banishment, had been by right the second Emperor.

Already his underhand diplomacy had embroiled the principal nations of Europe in a major war in the Crimea, and no one knew to-day what his next move would be, which country would be attacked from without or undermined from within. The world waited apprehensively on his pompous and ambiguous speeches, seeking to divine from his words his impenetrable intentions; and few of his actions caused more disquiet than his maintenance of a French Army in Rome to "protect" the Pope. Against whom was the smiling *Pio Nono* being "protected"? Against Austria? Against Piedmont? Against the Revolution? And who would protect him against his protector? . . .

Such would have been the view of the Emperor Napoleon III taken by the John Bullish tourist with mutton-chop whiskers who had looked into the church with his wife for a moment towards the end of the Mass and retreated after a severe glance at the Popish rite. Such (with some careful historical amendments) the view of the blond, monocled young professor from the University of Jena, Lieutenant in the Prussian Landwehr, who with early-rising thoroughness had been inspecting the monuments of the place, Baedeker

in hand, the military cadence of his footfalls making a remote, disregarded accompaniment to the words of the service. And through the dispersal of these jumbled pieces from the intricate cosmopolis of Rome the lay-brother Deodato, returning from the sacristy to extinguish the altar-candles, passed without any thought of their significance.

(3)

In the entry to the chapel his eye was caught for an instant by a gleam of gold. It came from under the bonnet of the younger of two women who were kneeling there in prayer. The older and stouter of them, at the moment of the lay-brother's passing, looked up, showing a round, plebeian face that stamped her as the follower of the young lady whose long fingers in violet gloves were still crossed over her features. These two, Deodato fancied idly, must have come in since the Mass was ended, for he had not noticed them when he came out with the priest at the end of it.

With hands that moved slowly in the kind of trance that still possessed him, he put out the candles, removed the Missal-desk, and spread the covering over the clean linen of the altar-cloth. The last footfalls of the departing congregation were dying away as the leather door-curtains of the church swished behind them. Deodato's eyes, while he completed his tasks, remained fixed on the Beata. Every detail of the statue was apparent now in the illumination from the side-window. Like the limelight of a theatre where the sun had been impressed as mechanician, it bathed the noble head in its eternal poise of ecstasy, which no criticism has been able to interpret fully in terms either of death-agony or of the rapture of life bursting fleshly bonds in the final transfiguration of love. Bernini, artist of the glowing eyes and enigmatic lips, seems here to disclose the secret of his mysticism, only to guard it more jealously in the very revelation. The inert marble shimmers with a passion that is incontestably human and unchallengeably divine, with the pulsation of life and the tremor of dissolution—and the principle that might harmonise the contradictions of the statue appears to be of fixed purpose withheld by the sculptor, as if he disdained to bare his soul for the crowd.

The two women had risen from their knees ; and while the elder lingered hesitatingly behind, the younger moved with a dignified

rustle of her purple skirts towards the altar and stood waiting close to the rails. Deodato gave a last look at the Beata, and descended the steps with downcast eyes that sought still to hold the vision of the marble face. He passed through the gates in the altar-rails; stooped to close them; then as he stood upright again checked with a quiver of all his body. His face flushed, and then went slowly white. For a moment his whirling brain seemed to cry at him that he was the victim of a delusion; next came the wild idea of a supernatural visitation; at last, while his heart knocked against his ribs, he stood simply staring, acknowledging a fact he could neither explain nor deny.

He was gazing into the face of the statue he had left behind his back! His eye, trained by rudimentary essays in sculpture, was not to be distracted by the colouring of the living model, by the hair of so bright a gold where its bands emerged from the coal-scuttle bonnet that it seemed to be powdered with the precious metal, by the pale brown of the large eyes, or the scarlet of the small, heavy-lipped mouth. Nor could Deodato be misled by the slight difference in contour, the nose a little shorter, the lower half of the face more elongated. The arch of the brows over the deeply recessed eyelids, the smooth, low forehead, the cleft in the firmly projecting chin, with the rounded, slightly voluptuous curve of the throat beneath, crossed by the black velvet ribbon of the bonnet, were indisputably those of the statue. And the white skin, showing hardly the least tint upon the cheeks, might have been marble, but for the soft texture and the faint golden down, like a mist of sunrise, that not even Bernini's hand could have illuded the spectator to see in stone.

At all this Deodato stood staring until a surprised look in the widening brown eyes warned him that he was behaving improperly. He felt his cheeks flush again, and with a bow and a murmur sought to pass by the bewildering visitant. She stopped him, however, putting out her hand in its violet glove.

"The Signorina desires something?" he inquired.

"*Si, Frate.* May one see the Beata Ludovica?"

"*Sicuro!* She is there." He pointed across the altar-rails.

"The work of the great Bernini," he added informatively.

"It is true," she assented. "But, I would say, may one not go nearer?"

"Of course, of course, if the Signorina desires!" He thrust

back the bolt of the gates. "The Signorina may go right up to the altar. Do not be afraid! But close . . . closer than that if it is your wish!"

She mounted the steps with the same stately rustle of skirts; then, encouraged by his gestures, advanced to the edge of the altar and lifted her face towards the statue's. From below Deodato watched her, marvelling. Her purple dress trailed on the dusty carpet; her waist was defined by her short, fur-trimmed jacket; her hands were stretched behind her as if in reverent fear lest she might touch the altar, the fingers slightly quivering. Her upraised profile was framed in the oval of her bonnet, much as that of the statue in its religious veil. With her small mouth open in excitement, and her eyes half-closed short-sightedly against the glare from the window, she might almost, he thought, as she faced the Beata, have been gazing into a mirror.

Presently she turned about and beckoned to her attendant. The servant came rolling plumply down the chapel, and stopped beside the lay-brother, smiling. "It is a marvel, a marvel!" she kept repeating to him.

"You mean the resemblance!" he answered in a low voice.

She looked puzzled. "I mean the statue. It is a marvel—the work of . . . of a craftsman . . ." She sought for words.

"Come here, Benedetta!" called her mistress from above, and Deodato thrilled to the contralto of her voice, to the faint throb in it, suggestive somehow of an unsatisfied want.

Benedetta shrugged and smiled, but did not move. She evidently had some superstition about passing the altar-rails. The other resumed her fascinated study of the stone face above her.

"It is her kinswoman, *Frate*," explained Benedetta, smiling with puffy geniality at the youth. "She is the Contessina Santacroce del Castello . . . the Contessina Ludovica."

"Ludovica!"

"That is *her* name, too. We come from Piedmont," gossiped the servant. "The Count, her father, has his property . . . ah! but a great one! . . . at Castello della Santa Croce in the hills, outside Turin, where the relic of the Holy Cross is kept, and a *palazzo* in the great square, opposite the Palace of the King Vittorio Emmanuele himself."

"But how is the Contessina kin to the Beata?" interrupted Deodato.

Benedetta touched her forehead with a finger, and then shook it despairingly. "A pile of old parchments, dirty sheep-skins," she groaned. "Who can find a way among them? But my dove is so proud to have a *Santa* for her *parente*! That is why she has come here, so soon as she arrived in Rome this morning—the first time in her life. To see her *Santa*!"

"Beata Ludovica is not a Saint," corrected Deodato, "only 'Blessed.'"

"Small chestnuts taste as sweet as large ones!" Benedetta waved the theological distinction away. "Let me tell you now that the Blessed Saint Ludovica——"

"The Blessed Ludovica!"—but Deodato could not help smiling, and the sudden flash of his white teeth caused Benedetta to blink at him as if he had changed into a different person.

"*Maricoli . . . Gesù!*" she ejaculated under her breath. "But that is what I said," she repeated, "the Blessed Saint! You must know, young man, she had a family of children before she became a *Santa*, and, through I know not how many windings," Benedetta made a serpentine motion of her hand, "there is some of her blood in the veins of the mother of my dove who bears her holy name. Now, will you believe *that* when I tell you?"

"Benedetta, what are you quarrelling about? Respect the *Frate*!" cried the Contessina imperiously, descending towards them.

"But he says the *Santissima* is no Saint, the innocent!" protested her servant. . .

"Do not you, then, Benedetta, teach the catechism to the *parroco*!" She turned to Deodato, smiling. "The Beata is indeed my kinswoman, *Frate*, though a far one."

"One sees it, Contessina!" cried the boy, "and not remotely, I assure you!"

"Sees it?" asked Ludovica, her pale-brown eyes enormous.

"*Madonna!* What do you mean, young man?" cried Benedetta, goggling with curiosity.

"The likeness! But it is so plain! Do you not see it, ladies? You, Contessina, might have sat to Bernini for his model. It is a miracle!"

The young friar had now indeed become another man. His whole face, with its pointed chin, its curved nose ending in chiselled, receding nostrils, had flashed into life. The repressed mouth had opened like

a flower ; the dulled eyes danced with light ; the blood had crept back to the pallid cheeks, restoring their natural light-biscuit tint. On his forehead two clusters of coarse curls spared by the tonsure, one upon each temple, shook and displayed their blue-black lustre. The women for a moment gazed at him in astonishment, while the elder involuntarily jerked out "*Com' è bello !*" then with a common impulse they turned to look at the statue.

"Can it be true, Benedetta?" demanded the Contessina. "Do you see a likeness? It cannot be! I would be too beautiful!" She glanced back to the lay-brother with a half-suppressed smile working her scarlet mouth. "You are a dreamer of dreams, *Frate!*" she declared.

He lifted his eyes to her as she stood on the step above him, and with a little shock she saw them shining with deep blue and grey lights.

"It is true," he said solemnly. "I am a dreamer of dreams. And you . . . are too beautiful!"

There was a moment's dead stillness in the little church, while its odours of stuffiness, of ancient stone, of wax and decaying incense seemed to gather round and oppress the embarrassed group. Then Benedetta made a clucking noise like an affrighted hen, clapped her hands together, and seized Ludovica by the sleeve. "*Che villanzone!*" she gasped. "And in the mouth of a *Frate!* Come away, my dear!"

For an instant Ludovica's marble-tinted skin had flushed a delicate pink. But she gently shook off Benedetta's hold. "The *Frate* speaks only as an artist," she said in a barely audible tone, "and he has been gazing too long at the beautiful statue."

Deodato realised her wish to spare him, and his heart swelled almost to bursting at her generosity. "I ask your pardon," he said simply, letting his eyes drop and imprisoning his hands in his monastic girdle.

"*Signore Dio!* So you should, young man!" scolded Benedetta, and suddenly broke into a giggle, half-frightened, half-thrilled.

"Be still, Benedetta! I am ashamed of you," said the Contessina in the same low voice. "It is true, is it not, you are an artist?" she asked Deodato.

He shrugged his shoulders, and felt the sting of his disciplining across them as something indescribably foolish.

"I model a little," he confessed, "when I have a moment. But I have no teachers, no opportunities. Bernini," he added with bitterness, "was not shut in a convent."

"But Fra Angelico! But Fra Filippo!" she remonstrated warmly. "And it is your vocation that comes first!"

"If this is my vocation!"

"You have taken the vows!"

He hesitated. "There is taking . . . and taking."

"You have doubts?" A painful wrinkle came into her forehead. "How old are you?"

"Eighteen, Signorina," he replied.

"Signorina, we must be going!" Benedetta again plucked at her arm.

Ludovica checked the gesture as before. "Why, *Frate*," she persisted, "why, then, did you come to the convent?"

"I did not come. I was abandoned in this church . . . before the High Altar there . . . as an infant, and the Fathers adopted me as an offering to God. That is the meaning of the name I bear, *Deo datus*."

"Deodato," murmured the servant, softly Italianising the name again. She was evidently intrigued by this part of the story.

"Naturally," the young man resumed with a shrug, "it was expected that I should take my vows when the day came without protest."

"You had, then, no family? No friends?" inquired Ludovica.

"Never any in the world," he answered.

"And you do not feel the call of God, here?" She pressed her finger-tips over her heart almost in the very gesture of the statue.

Benedetta, whose positive mind had strayed a little during the discussion of vocation, noticed this action and misread it. "You must come home, truly you must!" she interjected, snatching her mistress's hand away from her heart.

Deodato bowed. "It is true. I am encroaching. I ask pardon. No doubt my path will be shown me. I would not be ungrateful to the *Signore Dio* Who granted me this asylum. . . ."

"There are many mansions on earth, as in heaven, where one may serve Him," said Ludovica softly, as though speaking to herself, and her eyes lit up with a secret flame. Then, with a smile of the most innocent friendliness, she made the friar a little inclination of her head, and moved towards the doors of the church. Benedetta,

before turning to follow her, shook a finger at Deodato as at a naughty child.

While the door-curtain thudded behind them, the lay-brother stood as in a dream, his thumbs still pressed against his knotted girdle.

CHAPTER TWO

THE FUGITIVE

(I)

THE soft striking of a clock overhead brought the young friar back to himself and his tasks. He must begin to dust and arrange the church, and prepare the High Altar for the Sung Mass of the festival in an hour's time. During the illness of the Sacristan and several more of the lay-brothers, victims of a recent epidemic of the malaria to which the convent, standing low amid orchards on the river-bank, was always liable, the service of the sanctuary had in the general re-allotment of duties fallen to Brother Deodato. He picked up a duster and began mechanically to wipe the High Altar vases, and as he did so realised suddenly that a bird was singing in his heart.

It was singing the song of liberty to the boy moving amid the sunbeams, aswirl with dusty motes, that were pouring through the windows of the sanctuary. His prison walls were down; how or when the gate of physical escape would open to him he knew not, but he knew he was no longer bound. In the church dusting these tawdry gilt vases, in the refectory taking his breakfast of unsweetened coffee, in his cell with its staring white walls and irresponsive black crucifix . . . everywhere and anywhere he would be a delivered soul. Something he could not understand had come into his world and changed it. His whole being was flooded with the golden light that filled the church, and on an abrupt impulse he dropped his duster and fell upon his knees in a passion of wordless thanksgiving.

He heard the door-curtain swish and a footstep come into the church, but these sounds did not stir him from his absorption. Then a hand was laid roughly on his shoulder, and he turned round with a start to find a face at his side.

Above a wedge of wiry black beard he saw a bony hook of a nose with querulous dints at the nostrils. A tall, narrow forehead and straight brows over eyes that rolled and fled from side to side

completed his impression of the newcomer, who wore at the moment a look of extreme fatigue and pain.

"*Scusi, Frate!*" said a hoarse, unsympathetic voice, which had nevertheless a ring of youth in it, "I grieve to interrupt devotions which the *Signore Dio* will doubtless miss, but I desire merely to ask—have you seen two ladies in the church this morning—a young and an elder one, her attendant? . . . Come, it is a simple question, surely! No law will be broken by your answering. . . . *Dunque?*"

Deodato hesitated. He found something repugnant in this young man, though his clothes and accent showed him despite his rudeness to be a gentleman.

"So many people, *Signore*," he fenced, "come into this church. They come to see the pictures . . . the statue . . ."

"But among them, my good Brother, it would not be hard to distinguish the Contessina Santacroce del Castello and her servant."

"It may be, it may be," Deodato nodded. "But among so many how should I recall——"

"Possibly by her eagerness to see that statue of yours . . . her holy kinswoman," the stranger sneered in a voice that stung the friar's nerves like caustic. . . . "Ah! you do remember her! Your face tells me so! Come, now! How long since she was here? Where was she going after leaving this place? Did you happen to pick that up from the servant? . . . Can't you speak? Don't you see I am ill? I believe I shall faint in a moment if I cannot get assistance!"

Deodato noticed now that this strange young gentleman was all the time carrying his left hand in a peculiar way against his chest. There was a brown glove on it, and the fingers were inserted into his double-breasted waistcoat of black silk. "You have injured your hand, *Signore?*" asked the friar; and the next moment, as the young man tottered forward half-fainting, he put out his arm to hold him, seized the glove by accident—and it came away in his grasp. There was no hand there: only a thick roll of bandage stained with blood.

Deodato gave a cry of horror, and catching the mutilated man by the shoulders let him down gently upon the steps of the High Altar. "Wait but a moment!" he cried. "I will fetch water! I will find the *infirmarius!*"

The stranger's uninjured hand gripped him like a claw. "Stop!" he gasped, "Do you mean to be the death of me?"

"Assuredly not! But to succour you!"

"Do not move then! Do not cry out!" With an effort the sufferer forced his head down between his knees to check his faintness; then, "Pick up that glove!" he commanded in a hoarse whisper. "Put it back where you found it!"

Deodato found that the glove had been packed with rags and handkerchiefs to give the illusion of a hand. He could not imagine, noting how the injured man winced and hissed while he buttoned it as softly as he could round the bandaged stump again, why anyone in such pain should indulge in such a masquerade.

"Let me fetch you some water from the sacristy," he said. "I will not bring anyone else if you do not wish it." The young man nodded, and after drinking some of the water said in a firmer voice, "It seems you have wormed your fingers into my secret."

"I do not desire, Signore," answered Deodato with dignity, "to share any secret of yours. If you have perchance committed some act of crime——"

"Say, some act of justice!" The stranger ground his teeth; his eyes rolled savagely, showing their whites.

"In either case, I am not a minister of justice."

"No! Only a minister of Heaven, eh?" The man's fountain of bitterness seemed inexhaustible. He had roused himself to launch this shaft as if for the moment his wound and his weakness were forgotten. Deodato, though he had heard talk of infidels and Voltaireans, had never in sheltered Rome encountered such a phenomenon. He stood staring down at this amazing visitor, with the single furrow that took shape in the middle of his forehead when he was perplexed, deepening and bulging, as was its wont, at the base.

"I do not understand what you want," he said. "You say you are faint; one sees that you are injured. Yet you forbid me to help you, and you look at me as if you were my enemy."

"Your garb makes you my enemy," answered the other with a sidelong look of hate. "But the only help I want from you, good Brother, is precisely that which you will not give. You will not tell me how to find my sister."

"Your sister! *She!*" Deodato recoiled as if struck.

"Do you doubt my word?" asked the young man, with hoarse, aristocratic exasperation. "I am Count Piero Santacroce del Castello, whether you are good enough to credit it or not." He

pulled himself up short. "But I am a fool to let you know that too," he muttered, passing his hand over his forehead.

"I do not presume to doubt your word, *Signor Conte*," answered Deodato calmly.

"Highly flattered, *Frate*! Will you then give me this simple piece of information, if you can? My sister went out to visit this Church early this morning; I was told so at the place nearby where she is staying, Palazzo Benucci, when I inquired of the porter. Where did she go from here?"

"That I cannot tell you. She left but a few minutes before you arrived. I suppose that she may have returned home after her visit of devotion to the tomb of the Beata, her kinswoman."

"I believe she is more likely to have gone to Piazza Navona or the little squares round about, to search for old books on the stalls."

"But the Signore could surely await her return at the Palazzo Benucci, and be attended to there for his injury."

"No," snapped Piero. "It must not be known there that I am in Rome. I did not give my name to the porter." He struggled to his feet, leaning against the altar-railings. "What am I to do? There is not a living soul in Rome to whom I dare look for aid, but Ludovica!"

"Pardon, *Signor Conte*, but I am to the best of my poor powers at your service."

"You?" Piero's restless nut-coloured eyes, of a darker brown than his sister's, flickered over Deodato's habit. "That is a trap, is it not?"

"I have told you I am not an agent of the police!" Deodato was growing angry.

"Yet if you knew what I have done——" there was a crazy boastfulness in Piero's tone.

"Stop! Do not tell me! I wish to know only that you are the brother of that most noble lady, and for her sake have a claim on my help."

"For her sake? What is my sister to you, Friar?"

Deodato did not answer. But he felt his cheeks flaming, and saw a look of mockery worthy of a medieval grotesque wrinkle the pale face of Ludovica's brother. "Acquiring merit, eh, *Fraticello*?" he said. "Well, I have a sorry choice of friends here in Rome, so I suppose I must risk trusting you."

"I said, tell me nothing, *Signor Conte*," retorted Deodato.

"But you *shall* know, you *shall* know!" Seizing him again with that claw-like grip, Piero pulled him down to a sitting posture beside him on the lowest altar-step behind the marble railings. Deodato abruptly realised that the man must spill his secret to somebody or go mad. "Not here! Not here!" he stammered; "the people will be coming into the church to pray."

"They will not see us behind this balustrade. Now listen! Listen!" He put his mouth close to Deodato's ear and began to whisper.

"There were four of us waiting on the night of January 14th in the street outside the Opera House at Paris, myself, Gomez, Rudio, and our leader, the noble Orsini. Clutching our bombs under our coats, we waited for the Emperor, for the man of December, to pay our debts."

Deodato recoiled from him with a smothered cry of horror, but clinging to him, Piero drove his finger nails through the sleeve of the friar's habit till they hurt. "Ah! those moments of expectation: how wonderful they were! I ask myself, will life ever give me such a joy again? I felt, with every nerve strung taut, doubly alive! It is all before me at this moment—the keen winter evening, with the tall houses on each side of the street framing their strip of frosty, velvet sky; the surge and murmur of that crowd, the titters of the women, the excited shouts of the children——"

"The children!" groaned Deodato.

"The blaze of light from the gas-lamps in the Opera portico, the softer beams pouring through the windows of the foyer behind the balcony above. Then through the crowd ran an immense stir, and up the road towards us swept the cheer that heralds the idol of a duped people. On it came like a wave, and with it the noise of numberless hoofs, the clatter of the Lancer escort, the stately beat of the great horses of the Imperial coaches—over the heads of the throng I saw the pennons fluttering. Ah! that supreme moment, why could not Fate hold it to eternity—it and my rapture? Then . . . do not shrink away, you little fool, you will never hear a story like *this* again in your life! . . . then Orsini raised his black-clad arm and flung his bomb straight at the second coach that carried Napoleon and his Empress. I think Gomez on the other side of the road must have hurled his at the same moment, for I was deafened, yes, literally deprived of hearing, by the two crashes hitting my ears at the same instant. The whole of the

lamps on the façade of the Opera and in the street went out with the shock of that explosion. There remained only the bizarre glow from the foyer above, streaming through the coloured panes . . . yes, and I saw a few stars break out in the velvet overhead before the smoke . . . peugh ! how it smelt, pricking your nostrils like needles ! . . . covered them with its cloud. People were rushing about, nearly sweeping me off my feet ; I could see their mouths opening and shutting wildly, but I could hear nothing . . . not the shrieks, not the groans, nor the curses. I could see the soldiers and their horses writhing in heaps in the middle of the road ; just in front of me a woman lay still on her face, her white stockings glimmering ; the pavement sparkled with broken glass which I had not heard fall. Then the smoke thinned, and I saw *his* coach, the Emperor's, with shattered windows, driven right up against the pillars of the porch, one of its horses kicking in agony on the ground, the other rearing to be free. ' It is your moment ! ' I cried to myself, and with both hands I flung my bomb ! "

" Wretched madman ! " whispered Deodato, seeking to evade his grip again. " Into that crowd of innocents ! "

" Flung it, I say ; ah ! but, *Dio mio* ! how clumsily ! I suppose I had been shaken by the other explosions. It did not go whizzing through the air as I willed ; it slid out of my fingers, spinning like a cake of butter. I was blinded by the flash . . . felt a pain like a thousand red-hot knives tearing at this arm," he touched his mutilated member, " and everything disappeared, as a room does, you know, when the candle is blown out. . . . And I came to myself in a hospital, sick with that new drug of theirs, the chloroform. They had amputated my shattered hand . . . bound up my arm—— "

" Too good to you ! "

" Don't you see, don't you see their error ? They took me for one of the victims in the crowd, and pitied me most tenderly. ' Is the Emperor dead ? ' I asked. ' Unhurt, his opera hat crushed in, and that is all,' they answered ; ' and the Empress equally unharmed.' She walked, white as her evening gown with the blood of her soldiers on it, over the mangled horses into the Opera with her husband, and received the plaudits of the audience without flinching. I can almost admire that Spaniard ! Why is she the wrong side of the barricade ? "

" Why are you ? Did you think of your sister ? "

"Three weeks," pursued Piero, as if he had not heard these words, "I lay in that hospital, giving myself out to be an English visitor to Paris. We had all of us come from England, where the bombs were made, and I had a British passport in the name of Charles MacSweeney! British passports are useful, you know, they bear no personal description. I heard how Gomez and the noble Orsini and the rest had been taken, but no one doubted me. So soon as this wound was nearly healed, though the kind nuns wanted to keep me longer," he sniggered, "I left the hospital, blessing them. The day after I came out, sitting in a café, I picked up a newspaper and read the words, '*Où est le manchot Anglais ?*' that is, 'Where is the one-handed Englishman?' and realised that someone had seen everything. It was a working-woman, notorious in her quarter for her untrue tales, but who had at last found a journalist to believe her. I looked at the date of the paper; it was already two days old. It was fortunate, I thought, that my nuns had not been readers of the journals."

"Enough now!" interrupted Deodato, "I hear people coming into the church!"

"I strolled into a barber's," continued Piero unheeding, "with both 'hands' in my overcoat pockets, not to be clean-shaved, that has always a look of guilt, but to ask to have my beard trimmed and my long locks cut short. '*Je sens trop l'anarchiste*,' I told him, and how the little toad laughed! There I considered the cards in my favour. It seemed the other papers had not yet taken up the cry, but they soon would! The Englishman MacSweeney must clearly disappear—his passport had become merely dangerous for me to use. But I had, sewn into my jacket, the passport in my own name that Count Cavour, Minister to my King Vittorio Emmanuele, had given me the year before when bidding me leave my native land and never return there. Piero Santacroce had done no harm—in France. I travelled to Marseilles by the first train. The consul of His Holiness gave me the visa for the States of the Church without looking at any part of me but my sound hand, which was clinking three golden napoleons together. . . . Five days on the sea . . . and here I am." He looked round wildly. "Sometimes I doubt it, but it is true, is it not? I am in Rome?"

"In Rome!" groaned Deodato. "You have put your head into the lion's jaws! Why did you come here?"

"To find my sister, I tell you. . . No one else can help me. . . .

I knew she was coming to Rome. . . . She is the only person in this world who cares for me. . . . She will give me money, letters to friends of hers who will aid me. . . . But till she can be found, where can I take refuge? Not at Palazzo Benucci, where my father would deliver me up with his own hands to the Governor of Rome."

"But do the police in this place suspect you?"

"I have great fears. Not of Orsini; they will not make him speak—my brave and patient ox of the Romagna. But there is Gomez, who is a traitor, and who to save his head might at any moment reveal that the one-handed 'Englishman' is really Piero Santacroce. Then the Captain of the ship was always looking with suspicion at what I told him was a poisoned hand in bandages. . . . You see, it will keep bleeding. . . . I left the hospital too soon. And I saw him scanning the French papers. I am sure that Captain has followed me from the port of Civita Vecchia to Rome. . . . I will swear I saw his face at a corner of the street last night just after I had passed the Gates. . . . Why do I tell all this to you, a friar? . . . I must be senseless . . . but I had to speak to someone or go mad."

Deodato stood up and shook him by the shoulder. "I have told you I will help you. Come with me quick; I know a hiding-place for you for an hour or two till we can get some message to the Contessina. . . . But come quickly, do you hear? for I have work to do, and the people will be coming presently to the Mass."

With a dazed look, but a calmer air than he had shown before, Piero followed the lay-brother, who was searching among his keys, to the sacristy.

(2)

After a swift glance to make sure that the great panelled sacristy was empty, Deodato beckoned to Piero and led him hurriedly out by a door on the right into a passage-room with dim figures of bishops on slabs upon the wall, from whence mounted a narrow stair closed at the bottom by a grille. This grille the Brother unlocked and locked again behind them, and taking Piero by the shoulder helped him to ascend the stairs.

At the top opened a tiny chapel with a reredos of brown wood and gilding, in the midst of which from a golden ground stood out a haggard portrait of St. Francis, in the byzantine style. Through

bars beneath the altar came a glint of relics in metal cases. Dimly lit and shut off from all access except through the locked grille at the foot of the stairs, the place had an air of brooding peacefulness beneath the eye of the Founder of the Order.

"Is this my skulking-hole?" demanded Piero, sniffing about him like an unquiet cat.

"You are in the *cameretta*, the chamber that was inhabited by the blessed Saint Francis himself when he lived among us," answered Deodato in a hushed tone. "You will be under his care . . . you would do well to invoke his special protection."

"You seem to forget, *Fraticello*," jeered Piero, "that I have a *Santa* of my own on the premises. I can rely on the Blessed Ludovica."

"You are happy indeed," retorted Deodato with a flash of his blue-grey eyes, "in the aid of the Blessed," his voice shook, "the Blessed Ludovica!"

Again Piero looked at him with that air of a pallid Mephisto consumed by internal laughter. Then he sank down on the seat of a low praying-chair that had been left in a corner of the little sanctuary. "I will do well enough here for a while," he murmured, "try by all means to get this message to my sister"; and while Deodato held his pocket-book for him on his knee he scrawled a note in jerky characters.

Deodato nodded and left him, carefully locking the grille at the foot of the stairs behind him.

He then hastened to the porch of the church, and, after a rapid look to make sure there was nobody suspicious loitering in the square, beckoned to one of the boys who were playing about on the church steps. "Take this to Palazzo Benucci round the corner at the end of the street. . . . You know it? *Va bene!* A paul for you when you give it to the lady or her servant . . . to no one else!" The lad winked and sped off, enchanted at the notion of taking part in an intrigue. He wished for the first time that he had learned to read.

Deodato had now to hurry to get the High Altar ready for the ceremony, and had hardly time to think of anything else until the Mass had begun and he found himself kneeling outside the altar-rails, a little apart from the congregation.

In these first moments of quiet, while he listened to the organ and the chanting, his mind by some obstinate freak refused to form

plans for the fugitive upstairs in the *cameretta*, and would show him nothing but the living Ludovica's troubled face when he had blurted out to her his inner revolt against his vows. It was as though he had been brought to the tribunal of a new judge more awesome to him than the dim figure of an outraged Monarch above the clouds which had terrified his childhood and still had power to fill him with tremors.

Well . . . he had told her the truth when he had hinted that he had given no true internal assent to his vows on the day of his profession, a year ago. What true freedom of choice had he had, taught that he was a gift to God as soon as, leaving the foster-mother the friars had found for him, he had entered the school of the Fathers for his first education? At sixteen placed in the novitiate and clothed in the Franciscan habit, with not even the bare form of having his will consulted; and all that year of probation struggling to explain his repugnances, to convince the novice-master and his confessor that his flesh could not bear the yoke, that his spirit could not endure the seclusion, that his mind could not digest theology and ascetics!

While he was still a young boy they had seemed to understand something of his character. They had decided he should not aspire to the priesthood, but enter the order as a *conversus*, a lay-brother, to work with his hands . . . they had even detected his artistic impulse and encouraged it, sending him for lessons to a sculptor of pious images for commerce in the Borgo—who had kept him chiefly to the mechanical labour of pointing. But in the novitiate they had seemed to decide that his artistic leanings were a snare, and had bidden him think no more of them—a fearful narrowing of his prison.

At last the day of profession had drawn near, and he had frantically declared to his confessor his unwillingness to take the vows. That lean Father with the palely burning eyes had replied, "It is the Devil who torments you. You were plainly pointed out by the very finger of Heaven, given to God like Samuel in your infancy. I can find nothing in what you tell me but unreasonable scruples, whirling words." (That was not unfair; he knew he had not been able to say anything coherent or logical). "The *Signore Dio* has opened no other course of life at all to you," the priest had continued, "and in your circumstances I take the full responsibility. Pronounce your vows without fear; you will be happy afterwards."

That was how he had been made a friar—with the best and kindest intentions in the world. But he had never given a true consent of his own.

Burying his head in his hands, he sent his mind beating round the old, old circle. Was there any escape? A dispensation? Unthinkable for an insignificant little lay-brother like him. Flight? If he could contrive to break the bounds of the convent, the whole dominions of the Pope were still a prison. And even if he could escape there would always be the brand of his broken vows upon him. Yet was it any more honourable to live out an acted lie as a friar without belief in his vocation? . . . A sudden peace descended upon him as he now definitely repudiated that solution. Without realising what he had done he had passed from submission to the images of an angry God and a flickering Hell to acknowledgment of the judgment-seat within.

A crisis in his affairs he had known for some days was approaching. The *Padre Guardiano* of the Convent had summoned him to his presence some nights ago, and gently but lengthily cross-examined him about his state. At the end he had concluded that a change of place might bring Brother Deodato relief. He proposed to send him from Rome, the scene of his struggles and distractions, to the Convent of the Order at Assisi, a more tranquil spot where the memories of St. Francis at every turn would bring messages of aid and sanctity to the suffering soul. And he had concluded that they should both pray over this idea and consider it again in a month.

In the course of this interview Deodato had asked why he was no longer allowed to relieve himself by artistic work. He had been, on his issue from the novitiate, placed among the *olitores*, the gardening Brothers who kept the convent supplied with vegetables. The *Padre Guardiano* had replied gravely that he believed sculpture was a snare to Deodato's soul, and indeed had added with a sigh that he wished Rome were not filled with so many pagan statues . . . none the more edifying for being clothed in Christian robes and symbols. . . . So Deodato when not assisting the sacristy must stay a gardener, and practise modelling only in stolen moments in his cell. . . .

A gardener! Suddenly, without any preparation, rising as a finished work of his unconscious mind, the plan of escape for Piero unrolled itself before him.

For some time, owing to frosts and neglect by the depleted convent, the yield of their orchards and vegetable beds here at San Francesco had been insufficient for their needs. They had been drawing supplies from the large gardens of their sister Franciscan convent of San Sebastiano on the antique Via Appia outside the city walls, offering in exchange for *broccoli*, *cavolfiori* and *insalata* their own beetroot and one or two other crops that had escaped misfortune. Twice a week one of the *olitores* had the duty of driving out to San Sebastiano with the little cart and grey donkey stabled at the back of the orchards. They had become a familiar sight passing through the Porta San Sebastiano with a gay tinkle of the bells attached to the donkey's red collar, and not one of the guards or customs-officers at the old city Gate ever troubled to give more than a cheerful *Buon giorno!* to the *Frate* as he rattled by. For several months this task had been Brother Deodato's; and to-day was actually the day for making his visit to San Sebastiano, though they seemed to have forgotten it when they put him to the work of the sacristy. In the little cart, under a pile of sacks, baskets and what-not, he could convey through the Gates . . . any burden he chose.

To get Ludovica's brother outside the walls, that was the first essential step. Inside, he knew, the City swarmed with the spies and plain-clothes agents of Monsignor the Governor of Rome. They formed the first net through the meshes of which the fugitive must be smuggled. Not that the peril would end there. Outside the walls began the patrolling system of the mounted pontifical *carabinieri*, with their cocked hats and jingling sabres. These, if alarm were given, would search every village, every tiny *osteria*, every cottage and hovel on the desolate expanse of the campagna surrounding Rome. . . . Was there a place they would not search, where they would not believe any fugitive bold enough to seek refuge? Deodato believed there was, and that Piero, if he had the courage, might lie hid there in safety for one night at least, perhaps longer, if he were too weak to continue his flight. . . .

He was recalled from his plottings by the scrape of feet as the congregation rose for the last Gospel. As he stood up with them, he saw peering at him with a frightened look from behind a pillar the face of Benedetta.

(3)

The moment the celebrant and his ministers had disappeared into the sacristy, Deodato slipped round to the back of the church and beckoned the servant into a chapel.

"You had the note?" he asked.

"Surely, but my dove dare not come! The *Conte*, her father, has bidden her drive with him. . . . She has no money; only," she produced a small, heavy package, "here is her necklace and her bracelet of diamonds and rubies, which her brother can sell. . . . And he must leave Rome at once, but *subito*, do you understand? for he is suspected here already!"

"Why do you say that?" demanded Deodato quickly.

"Our *palazzo* is being watched by two men who came slinking round the pillars of the front archway just before I slipped out by the side-door in the little street behind the Hospital of San Michele. One of them is a sailor by his tattooed hands; the other with all the yellow look of a *sbirro*," she grimaced.

"So," murmured Deodato, "the Captain has gone to the police and they are suspicious . . . but they dare not act yet without an authority. . . . Still, at any moment they may learn more . . . a telegram from Marseilles, perhaps; and then it will be impossible to get him out of the city. I must lose no time."

"But where is he? Where will you take him, *Frate*?" [implored the servant.

"Trust that to me; there is no time for talking. Give me the jewels, I will hide them in my frock. Is there a letter there too? Good! By to-night, your mistress shall have news . . . that he is safe. . . . Do not say a word more to me, go away! There is the Master of the Lay Brothers entering the chancel, looking for me. . . . Stop! Buy food at the nearest shop; make a bundle, and throw it over the orchard wall at the foot of the lane that runs down to the river by the side of our infirmary! . . . As quickly as you can, do you understand?"

"*Maricoli-Gesù!* You make my heart thump, young man!"

"Not a word! Do as I say. Go! Go, if you want to save him!"

"I will, I will . . . for her sake: she loves him! But I tell you he is mad. *Maria Vergine!* He has the ideas of a cut-throat, not a gentleman! And this time, I believe he has done something fearful!"

As soon as she had scuttled out of the church, Deodato emerged from the chapel, and meekly received the fretful complaints of the *Magister Conversorum* on the state in which he had left the sacristy.

"It is that there is so much to do——" he pleaded.

"And the more culpable, then, to waste time gossiping with old women in the church!"

"A pious soul," he said humbly, "who wants to know the hours of confession." True to the system of casuistry in which he had been brought up, Deodato told his conscience that probably Benedetta did want to know. He had not said she had asked—and he reminded the fussy, but easily placable, official that it was his day to drive to San Sebastiano for the vegetables.

"Do not linger there, then! Be back at three for Matins!" cautioned the Master, and hurried off on his own duties.

"I go at once to tidy up the sacristy," Brother Deodato called after him.

Swiftly his sandalled feet pattered up the stairs to the *cameretta*, where he found Piero still huddled in his corner, but gazing at the portrait of St. Francis over the altar, and meditatively twisting his beard.

"Come!" he said, "there is no time to waste. You must take a little risk and walk through the church, slowly, as if you were a sightseer. Then turn down the lane to your right . . . still sauntering I beg of you . . . and lie down by the river-bank, your hat over your face, as if you were sleeping. In ten minutes I will come to the corner of the orchard wall with a cart, and conceal you in it under sacking. . . . Are you listening to what I say, *Signor Conte*?"

"I am looking at your patron," answered Piero in a dreaming voice. "A man born out of due time, if ever man was! How little he could do in the night of the Dark Ages; how much he could do to-day! Yet he gave the first shock to thrones; made diadem and tiara rock on their wearers' brows; set the prisoners dreaming of freedom! He stripped himself of all rather than have bare comfort while so many starved!"

Deodato succeeded in interrupting him. "I am glad," he said hurriedly, "that you have a devotion to the bearer of the holy stigmata——"

"Stigmata!" Piero touched his mutilated limb. "And is not

this a wound accepted for the sake of the oppressed and suffering too?" he demanded.

Deodato shuddered. "This is not the moment to dispute, *Signor Conte*, for the love of St. Francis——"

Piero snorted. "St. Francis! It is not for his love or for the sake of religion that you are succouring me, *Fraticello*. I know that well enough. It is for the love of my sister and her eyes of an *estatica*!"

"If you insult me again," said Deodato, flushed and panting, "I will leave you to your fate! The *sbirri* are watching outside Palazzo Benucci already, let me tell you!"

Piero shrugged his shoulders and listened again to his instructions. Then he took the jewels, and read his sister's letter—perfunctorily enough, Deodato thought.

"She wishes to know where I mean to seek refuge . . . so that she may communicate with me again . . . Where are we going, *Fraticello*?"

"That you will know when we get there," answered Deodato, exasperated. "Do you understand this, *Signor Conte*? They are not watching this church and convent yet, I believe. But who knows when they may pick up your traces again? Waste a few more minutes, and it may be too late to escape!"

"*Andiamo*!" said Piero, dragging himself to his feet and saluting the portrait of the Saint. "Adieu for a while, Little Brother of the Poor!"

CHAPTER THREE

THE CATACOMBS

(I)

THE escape from the church was effected some quarter of an hour later without hitch or alarm. No one challenged Piero as he strolled across the square into the lonely lane; Deodato, after harnessing the donkey and filling the cart with old sacks, duly found the bundle of food he had asked Benedetta to procure tossed over the enclosure at the farthest corner of the orchard by the river; and when Piero hurried up crouching from under the bank, and slipped himself in among the sacks and baskets, not a soul observed them in the sunlit corner of white garden walls running to the water's edge.

Now, after negotiating the narrow streets of Trastevere and crossing the Tiber, they were trotting under the Palatine Hill and past the giant ruin of the Baths of Caracalla without anything to cause disquiet in the look of the streets. As usual the echoes were awakened only by the demure tread of priests or monks walking in pairs, by the jingle of mule bells, by the rattle of small rustic carts like their own, and the clip-clop of the small *carrozze* that drew the foreign sightseers from church to church across the dreaming spaces of the City of God.

At Porta San Sebastiano in the old city wall of the Emperor Aurelian there was equally no sign of suspicion. The two dismounted *carabinieri* stood as usual wrapped in their capes by the gateway, and the *doganiere*, with St. Peter's keys on his frowsy cap, as usual smiled through the blue bristles on his chin at the *Frate* without stopping the cart for customs examination.

They were out! and speeding merrily down a steep country lane between the high walls of vineyards and the gardens of secluded villas, shut in by iron gates. The first and worst part of Piero's danger was over—so simply! Deodato began to feel a little of that exaltation in successful conspiracy of which Piero had spoken in

the church, and was surprised to find in himself even that much kinship with a man he so cordially loathed. But the idea of escape had taken hold of him, and filled all his thoughts as the donkey cart jolted over the uneven lava stones of the ancient imperial Via Appia.

Escape! If a criminal like this Piero Santa Croce del Castello could escape, why should not he, who had no crime upon his soul? For it would be no crime, he was now tranquilly convinced, to cast off vows that had been imposed on him against his consent, like fetters. He was free to forsake the convent, if he could, and fly he meant to—*now*. "There are many mansions," she had said, and the throbbing music of her voice was in his ears still. Of course, there were many modes of serving God, in the world as well as in the cloister. Besides monks and priests, there were soldiers, writers, artists. . . . Yes, surely art might be a vocation; every church in Rome proclaimed it. . . . Dare he hope ever to be an artist?

A violent swing of the cart brought his thoughts back to the man covered by the sacks at the bottom of the cart. With his hurt member he must be suffering terribly from this jarring drive—yet it was a thing to be endured for his safety. And Deodato could put him in a place of absolute safety. There was perhaps no one else in Rome who both would and could. Beneath the Church of St. Sebastian upon the Appian Way lay the catacombs dedicated to the Saint, an endless labyrinth of abandoned quarries that began at the vaults of the church and stretched away in black mystery for who could tell how many miles beneath field and vineyard into the heart of the campagna? beneath road and garden and villa, back, perhaps, under the walls of the city.

Only a few of the narrow, arched galleries which the primitive Christians had used for cemeteries, for minute chapels to house their prohibited worship, for places of refuge during the tempests of persecution had remained unobstructed by debris as the Roman Empire slowly decayed in the dethroned capital of the world. Only a few more had been cleared in recent times by the picks and spades of investigators eager to feast their eyes upon the sacred frescoes, the funerary inscriptions and hieratic emblems that disclosed to the torches of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries the life and thoughts of their fathers in the Faith.

To this small mapped and explored area the friars at San Sebastian acted as guides. What lay beyond the tiny circle which they passed round with their listeners by the flicker of wax tapers

they knew no more than those they guided. Superstition might toy with the notion of spectres, monsters, and were-wolves lurking in the thick, dusty silence that extended for leagues beneath the suburbs of Rome and its surrounding plain. Reason, coloured by exaggeration, preached the deadly peril of those who separated themselves from the huddled little cortèges that moved in their ring of candle-light from charted point to charted point of the daily pilgrimage. To turn aside to right or to left down the tunnels that diverged from the trodden route, to advance alone beyond the point where the guide announced the return of the party and sent the shadows of his candle-flame leaping back in fear towards the entry, might well mean madness or death.

Many were the tales of those who had presumptuously sought to turn explorers for themselves, had lost their bearings, and wandered blindly till exhaustion, hunger, thirst brought them down, and added their bones to the crumbling skeletons and grinning skulls of the old Confessors dotting the burial shelves in the walls—skulls, it might seem to the excited fancy, inhabited now by mocking demons, who had for a brief space, until the Judgment Day, crept into the shells of a sanctity already raised to Heaven.

Such was the legend of the catacombs, a tower of fancy on a basis of fact—but the fancy was not discouraged, since it helped to maintain the flow of pilgrims and of visitors who loved to mingle the *macabre* with the pious or antiquarian purposes of their visit to subterranean Rome.

Deodato knew more of the catacombs than most. For two or three years when he was a schoolboy he had been permitted to pass the hot summer vacations, with some other pupils of the Fathers' Seraphic College who had no parents in Rome, in the fresh air of the Convent of San Sebastiano. And he had quickly been enthralled by the romance and thrill of that haunted underground world. By constantly accompanying the friars who acted as guides he had made himself at home among the burial slabs and vestiges of ancient altars hewn from the rock, and had grown familiar with the strange slanting faces of the Saints and the Good Shepherd which glimmered from the half-effaced paintings on the vaults of the chapels.

Presently familiarity had robbed these places, as it does all others, of half their terrors, and the boy had dared to make truant explorations of his own, tying a reel of thread to some jut of the rock, and clinging to the end of it as he made his fearful way by the light

of a purloined candle-end down passages where his shoes were the first for ages to leave their imprint on the grit and debris of the broken floor. Up and down the mysterious paths switchbacked ; he would catch glimmers of vines, sacred fishes, the Christ-Orpheus piping souls from Hell, solemnly staring Byzantine eyes under curls like bunches of grapes. Then one day, after pulling down a pile of rubble that almost totally obstructed a narrow side-passage, he discerned, more ghostly even than the darkness and the yellow haze of his candle with its train of crouching shadows, a shaft of pale blue light in the distance, and for a long while, suspecting some supernatural visitation, dared not advance towards it.

At last, however, the core of stubborn defiance in his nature which had always underlain his intellectual and imaginative submission to the teachings of the Fathers, asserted itself, taunting his cowardice. Tremblingly he had advanced towards the strange pillar of blue light, and had found it—simply the day coming through a narrow slit at the top of a funnel of rock running up he could not guess how many feet overhead. It was in fact a *luminare* or ventilation-hole made by the original architects of the catacomb. Like the sword of an angel, this blade of light struck down into a small rounded chamber, entered from the passage where the boy was crouching through a raised arch, the steps up to which had crumbled.

Through this arch the excited boy had scrambled into a circular chapel, where, like a company of spectres waiting to greet him, a grim byzantine Christ with dank black locks and thick lips stood in the circle of the Twelve Apostles, each wearing a faded gold halo and raising a ghostly hand in a benediction that seemed like a menace. In spite of a hollow worn by rain under the *luminare*, the place was dry, warm and freshly ventilated from above.

How Deodato had hugged himself at the thought of this secret castle of his own to which none of the friars knew the path ! On his way back he had carefully piled up again most of the rubble that had blocked the entry of the passage leading to it ; and once in a fit of rebellion against some petty monastic punishment had taken refuge here for a day and a night, and only surrendered himself when his stock of stolen provision from the convent kitchen was exhausted to the last crumb. Nor had he been induced to betray his hiding place by threats or wheedlings, having a presentiment that it might be useful to him one day.

This was the day ! Already the ornate Renaissance façade of the

Basilica of St. Sebastian was showing beyond a group of cypress trees at the foot of a dip in the road. As he had sought to do, Deodato had arrived just at the convent dinner-hour, and there seemed not a soul stirring about the place. He drove the cart a little way down a lane beside the garden, and tied it up there. Then, with Piero by his side and carrying the little bundle of provisions, as though they were two pilgrims from the country, he mounted the deserted steps of the church and led the way into the haggard stone interior, which struck a chill to them after the sunshine outside. Piero shivered; he looked as if the jolting ride in the cart had told heavily upon him.

Deodato beckoned him round to the back of the side-altar beneath which lies Bernini's statue of the Saint, dying like an Adonis in the pride of youth under the arrow-wounds. He tried a door in the apse of this chapel and, as he had hoped, found it unlocked. A winding stair descended to a windowed vault communicating with the catacomb. As Deodato plucked a handful of tapers from a bundle lying in a corner, lit one from a lamp before an image, and offered another to Piero, the fugitive recoiled, pointing with his one hand to the black mouth of the steps leading down to the subterranean world.

"Is it there I am to be left alone. . . . For how long? . . . A night at least?" His face looked greenish in the cold light of the vault; his teeth clicked together. "I cannot," he protested, "I would be dead!"

"*Signor Conte*," said Deodato, "you are likely to be dead if you do not. There is only one place under the walls of Rome which neither the *carabinieri* will dare to search nor the Fathers of the convent in the region consent to search for them, and that is the unmapped parts of the catacombs."

"And you would take me thither? I shall be lost; I shall starve."

"You should have three days' food in that bundle you carry. Here I have two bottles filled with water. I swear to you that to-morrow or the next day at the latest I will find means to deliver you."

"If you play me false I shall be imprisoned there till I wither up like a *corpo santo*, or if I try to make my way out, wander till my feet are worn to stumps like my arm in that foul labyrinth of death. . . . I will not go down!"

"If you stand here till some of the Brothers perhaps come from their dinner and ask us what we are doing, you will have lost your chance of reaching this hiding-place. *Signor Conte*, the guillotine brings a blacker darkness than the catacombs."

Piero with a desperate gesture held out his candle to take the flame from Deodato's.

(2)

Yet it was not without compunction that Deodato at last left him in the secret chapel. He had done the little he could for his comfort. Piero had food, water, candles, some linen stolen from the sacristy to make clean bandages, and a sack Deodato had carried from the cart to soften his stone couch. Yet, as Deodato made his own way back to rejoin the corridor that led to the frequented part of the catacomb, he carried with him a troubling picture of the fugitive's sick face—something young and almost innocent about it, behind all the bluster of profanity, the cynicism, the diseased excitement over images of blood and violence.

He began to perceive that convent standards of black and white gave little help in judging creatures from the world outside. . . . What a strange world, but how full of alluring mysteries!

Suddenly before him he caught a gleam of candle-light and heard voices. He stopped in his tracks so as not to be seen. Evidently an unexpected party of visitors had arrived during the friars' brief after-dinner siesta, and somebody had been deputed to show them round. In the dark Deodato stood waiting while the voice of the guide grew louder with his well-remembered homily, and fainter again as he passed the mouth of the tunnel round a curve of which Deodato was hiding. There followed a scrunch of boots as his flock followed him in single file. At the end of the file came two who were lingering behind and talking in English.

Now of this tongue Deodato by chance had some rudiments. One of his teachers at the Seraphic College had been on the English Mission and loved to air scraps of the language. They had fallen with an odd fascination on the ears of the foundling boy, who used to coax the Father to teach him more phrases. Hearing of this, the then Father Guardian of San Francesco had shown an unexpected interest. "It is perhaps a sign," he had said. "Providence may design our Deodato for the English Mission. . . . If so it would be

a reparation . . . but I must not say more. Encourage the boy to learn the tongue."

And Deodato had been encouraged for a while, and had worked with enthusiasm at his English. But like most teaching that was not part of the Latin dogmatic and moral curriculum, it had soon fallen into neglect; and when he had been adjudged inapt for the priesthood no one had worried any longer to teach him any modern languages. French Deodato had more or less taught himself in order to be able to read the lives of the religious artists in the convent library, and of English he still remembered enough to understand the gist of what a man's voice was now saying just out of his sight.

"I still maintain the fellers had no right to stop our carriage at the Gate and search it. Her Majesty has no Ambassador to the Pope or I would lodge a complaint. What have I to do with their plots and their confounded politics?"

"The man in the cocked hat, Ned," answered a young woman, "said it was his duty to look for a traveller with one hand."

"Well, I could have proved to the beggar *I* had two fists all right, and I very nearly did."

"Ned, you'll get us into trouble one day, and on your honeymoon, too! . . . Now, please, let us go on! I want to hear what that monk is saying, and if you stay here we shall get left behind and lost in the dark."

"I do think you should feel safe with me, Vi! It would take more than one of their popish peep-show places to throw *me* out!"

The honeymoon couple went on laughing together, and Deodato stood for a moment feeling perspiration on his forehead. How fine they had cut it! By what a narrow margin they had saved themselves! Already the warrant had been issued for the arrest of *le manchot*, and if they had delayed but another half hour they might have been stopped at the Gate! And in the shock given to his nerves by this exceedingly narrow escape, Deodato, sweating still more profusely, felt the full burden of his rash undertaking. He had sworn to return to-morrow or the next day at latest to release Piero—as if it would not need a whole mechanism of diplomacy to get permission for returning again to-morrow to San Sebastiano out of the regular routine. Not that this troubled him too much. He had become an adept in circumventing the punctilious but easily evaded discipline of the convent. The Brother Gardener

here, a jovial, rustic type, would surely help him to make up an excuse. But he was wholly at a loss to know where he could send Piero after bringing him to the light again, or what disguise he could find for him.

As he meditated these difficulties he was disconcerted to come at the top of the steps from the catacomb upon a Father from the community of San Sebastiano, one of the only two or three left, as it happened, who remembered Deodato from the days when he used to visit there as a schoolboy. In his recent comings and goings as the *olitor* of San Francesco a Ripa he had encountered only the Brothers who worked in the garden. This *Padre*, a merry-faced little black-haired man, was lighting a taper in the vaulted room, preparatory to escorting some more visitors, whose voices could be heard at the top of the staircase.

"Brother Deodato!" The Father blinked at him in surprise.

"I am an apparition here, Father?" Deodato laughed. "I am waiting to see the Brother Gardener, and in the meanwhile I went to make a little visit to the holy martyrs . . . an old devotion of mine." (Well, he had said an *Ave* as he passed down there; but he was beginning to feel that casuistry and conspiracy could not be driven much longer in a pair.)

"*Sicuro!*" the little Padre blinked amiably. "And next time you visit San Sebastiano you will not see me. . . . No, I am being sent to Naples; my *obedientia* is already written out and given to me. *Addio, Frate!*"

As he went up the steps to the garden to search for the lay-brother in charge, Deodato's mind was racing with a totally new idea, suggested by the little Father's words below. . . . For a few minutes he had to lay his scheming aside while he found the Brother Gardener and loaded up his cart. Then as he began the homeward route his fresh plan took shape. The words of the *Padre* down below yonder had given him the picture of a solitary friar travelling through the savage country-side and the sleepy little cities of the papal dominion. . . . What possible better disguise could be found for Piero than a Franciscan habit, its long, hanging sleeves, into which the friars habitually thrust their hands when walking, serving to conceal his mutilation. Yes, but where steal a habit for him . . . and how provide him with the "obedience," the slip of paper signed by the Superior of the convent he was leaving to certify his identity and destination? No friar could go many miles in the States

of the Church without being summoned to show his *obedientia*. . . . How was that problem to be met?

The answer, when it flashed over Deodato, caused him to let the reins fall on the donkey's back and allow the beast to pull into the side of the road to snatch at thistles. The "obedience"—but it had been as good as promised to him, Deodato, already by the Father Guardian, the order to journey to Assisi! If he could persuade the Guardian to let him go to-morrow or the next day there could be an exchange of clothes and passes down in the secrecy of the catacomb. Piero in friar's garb could work his way northwards towards the papal frontier, and find his own means of crossing over into the lenient Grand Duchy of Tuscany. Deodato in Piero's clothing—and with the passport of the Englishman MacSweeney, if Piero still possessed it—could go . . . into freedom, wherever he would in the wide world! It was incredible; it was intoxicating! . . . He sat for nearly a quarter of an hour in the little cart by the roadside in a state of helpless beatitude, afraid to see the beautiful idea vanish if he stirred.

Then, realising that he would be late for Matins if he lingered, he whipped up the donkey and came to the time-gnawed towers of Porta San Sebastiano again. It was shut and picketed by a file of *carabinieri* under a brigadier, who examined everybody seeking egress or entry to the city, and would not let the gate be opened for passage till they were satisfied. Even the *Frate* this time did not escape having his vegetables and salads turned over and prodded by police sabres, and had to undergo a gruff cross-examination by the brigadier before he was allowed to pass. He reached the convent only just in time for Matins, and at the end of the office asked leave to see the Father Guardian.

(3)

Father Silvestro was a tall man of the enormous corpulence that Nature often sends in unkind mockery upon the ascetic. Though he touched no wine and ate less than a sparrow, his cheeks were puffed and crimson; his keen black eyes danced like those of a boon companion behind his thick spectacles; and his bulk prevented his ever drawing his chair close to a table. He had a curious walk, a sort of heavy trot like an old lady in a hurry, a rumbling, wheezy chuckle, and an insatiable passion for drawing pious reflections.

from every contingency. Immersed in devotion, the *Padre Guardiano* seemed to live half in another world ; but the half that remained in this one had the sharpness of a detective and an old maid's passion for detail. He had to teach everyone about the convent their business—the cantors how to sing, though he himself could only croak ; the novice-master how to train the postulants, though he would have stupefied them with his mystical meanderings ; the gardeners how to produce flowers and vegetables he could not even name correctly.

Was Father Silvestro a kind man ? Deodato had often asked himself that question. Indulgent in trifles, never rebuking without moist eyes, good as gold to the submissive ; yet to the rebellious he could be as stone. In his eyes, the dogmas of the Faith, the Rule of the Order, the deference due to the sacerdotal caste, could only be challenged by Satan. But if these were not questioned, he could sometimes show understanding and sympathy. Deodato, standing before him with eyes lowered and hands concealed in his hanging sleeves in a proper attitude of conventual submission, was hopeful of having his way—if he were careful.

"Well, my son," said the Father Guardian at length, laying down his pen, "have you thought well . . . and prayed well . . . over my words to you last time we spoke together ? Do you think that at Assisi, in the very home of our beloved Founder, you would find some peace for your soul—your poor soul ?" There was a touch of moisture behind his spectacles as he uttered these last words.

"In so far, Father," Deodato could not restrain himself from blurting, "as any one could find peace in a convent at all whose vows had been taken as mine were !"

"Set your foot upon that poisonous thought !" replied Father Silvestro, trying to lean forward over his writing desk, and speaking in a tone of earnest authority. "It is the plain voice of Satan, tempting you to your ruin. There was no flaw at all in your vows, no shadow of misconstruction—how could there be ? All was done in strict accord with our Holy Rule."

"Nevertheless, Father, my confessor——"

"You have told me. He acted like a prudent and charitable priest, and from a pure love of your soul. If further confirmation could be needed, is there not the fact that you were, as by a special predestination, marked out from infancy to serve God in the Religious Life ? You were given to Him by your parents after the flesh."

"What do I know of that?" Deodato, though he felt it was impolitic, could not help resisting this ancient argument. "The intentions of my parents, Father, have never been discovered. Ah! if they could be found!" he pressed his hands together in anguish, "my parents—if only they could be found! At least they might clear some of the shadows from my path. They might free me from these dreams that torture me so—dreams of walking blindfold over what I know is an abyss, ignorant of who I am, or where I am going."

"Sit down!" commanded the *Padre Guardiano* kindly. "Let us at least do what we can to free your mind from that part of its burden. A Religious, my dear son, should not busy his thoughts with those he had left behind him in the world—parents, relations, friends. He is truly become a new creation——" Father Silvestro looked upwards with a glance of ecstatic gratitude and seemed trembling on the brink of a homily. But he checked himself and came back to earth and to the tormented face of the boy twisting from side to side on the hard chair before him.

"Be calm!" he said. "Be calm! A moment's recollection, my child! . . ."

At length, when he judged Deodato to be more composed, with one of his wheezy chuckles, "*Omne ignotum pro magnifico!*" he said. "Because your parentage is unknown to you, you dream of something marvellous, disturbing. Yet I believe the truth is nothing very magnificent, after all."

"You know it, then?" Deodato looked up eagerly. This had never been disclosed to him before. "Why have I not been told?"

"Because it could not profit your soul, or help you to press on towards the mark! But if ignorance and wondering are becoming a temptation to you, it is better that you should know the little that we do . . . and perhaps the matter will cease to prey upon your mind. . . . You know you were laid here in our Church in your swaddling-bands before the High Altar one dark evening just before the doors were closed eighteen years ago. There was nothing on you by which our Fathers could trace who had abandoned you or where you came from. So you were adopted as the child of the Community, sent to a foster-mother till you were of age to go to the Seraphic College, and accepted then to serve God as one of our lay-brethren. All that you know—but you cannot sufficiently meditate on it and what it shows you of the goodness of the *Signore Dio* and the charity of our Fathers."

"I am not ungrateful to the Fathers!" Deodato almost sobbed.

"You would have a hard heart, my son, if you were. Now this, I do not doubt, will be new to you. You were perhaps five years old when a lawyer came from London."

"From England!"

"A Signor Greeves. . . . I remember the name, for the then Father Guardian, Padre Bonaventura, whose health was bad, used me as his assistant in the affairs of the House. This English lawyer told us he had extracted a confession from a poor woman of Rome to whom you had been given by your mother, with a certain sum of money, to bring you up as her own child. But her husband had lost the money, playing *terno* after *terno* in the lottery, and so she rid herself of the burden of you, placing it in the hands of God. *Poveretta*—whoever she may have been! That the lawyer would not say."

"But what had he come for himself?" demanded Deodato eagerly.

"Patience! Patience! His client, he told our Father Guardian, who afterwards told me, was a rich lady in England——"

"Rich!" sighed Deodato, and the Guardian sighed too, but with a different intonation.

"You were the child," he said, "of a servant of hers, a woman to whom she had grown deeply attached."

"A servant!" Deodato's voice was dashed.

"Who had sinned with a Roman of Rome, and rid herself as she hoped of the fruit of her sin, just before entering this rich lady's service, as her companion, *governante* of her household. Dying of the cholera in London, she had confessed her secret to her loving mistress and implored her to find the child and rescue it if it were possible. So this *avvocato*, Greeves, was sent all the way to Rome."

"It was much to do for a servant!" exclaimed Deodato, wondering.

"Doubtless." The *Padre Guardiano* looked woodenly in front of him. "But she had been a much loved servant. Briefly, then, the *avvocato* desired to take you back with him to London . . . to be educated by Protestants. The Fathers, naturally, would not hear of such an affront to the good God. The lawyer, I believe, used menaces; he declared that the offer would never be repeated. Then he offered to pay a sum for compensation to the convent. Our good Fathers replied that they did not sell souls for gold. That was thirteen years ago now; nothing more has been heard. Had our

Fathers surrendered their sacred trust, you would only have been placed in some Protestant orphanage in England . . . not to speak of your eternal ruin. You are not sorry, surely, my son, that we would not let you be made a Protestant?"

"Assuredly not!" Deodato had never had occasion to criticise the picture the Friars painted of Protestants. "But Father, this English lawyer, who would not speak his client's name, did he at least give you his own address?"

"It cannot concern you——"

"Except," suggested Deodato, "that if it were true that I have any patrimony, however modest, the good Fathers might be repaid something of what I have cost them."

The *Padre Guardiano* gave his wheezy chuckle. "We do not want repayment, if we can give the Lord God a good friar in you, my child. Still," he reflected, "what you say is just, and it is perhaps reasonable that you should know the little we know about this man. 'Thomas Greeves,' I remember the name well. And also, because it struck me as odd, that his card gave some *piazza* in London as his address, called by a name out of the Holy Scriptures. 'Heli,' that was it: the High Priest Heli!" He rumbled, "The English are strange. Mind!" He held up an authoritative hand: "You will not be permitted to communicate with this individual unless your superiors judge there is utility in it. Assuredly, not now."

"I thank you, Father," said Deodato, and repeated to himself, "Greeves, Piazza Heli."

"And now will you cease dreaming about heritages that are only castles in Spain?" asked the *Padre Guardiano* genially, "and consider what alone truly matters, your soul? You wish to go to Assisi, then?"

"If I may go at once!" Deodato sat suddenly bolt upright in his chair, "for it is certain I cannot endure another day in this House!"

"What are these wild words?"

"Ah! you do not understand, my Father, you do not understand! Here where every room, every wall reminds me of some struggle, some despair, I cannot be at peace, even for an hour. All my temptations are in this convent!"

"And in this church!" Father Silvestro shot him one of his detective glances. "The statue of that woman! I have seen the eyes with which you regard it!"

"Father!"

"You cannot deceive me. It is not your fault, but that of the sculptor—to make such a figure for a church. *È un gran peccato!* No, there is nothing good for you any longer here at San Francesco . . . nothing good for us in your lingering."

He did not say that one of the novices had been disturbed a few nights ago by the sound of sobbing in the passage adjoining the closely guarded novitiate. He had guessed who had broken the Rule by wandering desperately about the corridors of the convent at night, though he had thought it more politic at the time to let the matter drop.

"Then may I go—to-morrow?"

"To-morrow?" The *Padre Guardiano* started. "Is not that somewhat self-willed? And with so many Brothers away from duty?"

Deodato felt he must try a piece of acting. He sprang from his chair and stamped upon the floor. "Then you will drive me mad . . . do you understand, mad? I shall be struck down like old Padre Bartolommeo, who was for years wheeled round these cloisters in a chair, the dead shell of a living man. Or, if my brain goes, I shall become as wild as Padre Evurchus, who was found dancing in the church here and playing a pipe before *Santa Maria Vergine*——"

"Sit down, my son! Recollect yourself, I command you on your holy obedience!"

Deodato obeyed with his breast heaving. He noticed, he thought, a faintly frightened look in the corner of the Guardian's eye. For the moment, however, Padre Silvestro said nothing; only removed his spectacles and sat tracing cracks in his desk with the point of them.

Just for a moment a suspicion pierced his mind. This abrupt demand to leave the very next day. Had it some concealed object? Was it possible, for instance, that there was a woman, a live woman, not the troublesome stone one, in the case? But as soon as he framed the thought he scouted it. What opportunities had Brother Deodato, always at work in the House or church, who had never even been allowed to take a walk in the streets of Rome without an elderly friar going with him as companion and guard, what opportunities had he had of starting an intrigue with a woman? No, it was just one of those nerve storms that destroyed the peace of convents. And if that was so, the Brother was right; the sooner

he went the better. His reminder about poor old Padre Evurchus was pungent—they wanted no repetition of that. There was trouble enough for the *Padre Guardiano*, without inviting any more. There were two unsuitable subjects, he felt sure, among the novices, who must be got rid of instantly. If Brother Deodato was going to be a disturber, he might leave when he liked.

And a profound discouragement stole over the Guardian. Deep down in his heart he did not believe they would ever make this strange young man a friar pleasing to God. He had an expression sometimes—the *Padre Guardiano* had been reminded of the merry, impudent young satyrs that danced round pagan urns—an altogether unpleasing expression, worse than the long face he pulled in his melancholies, troublesome as they were! A weary, very human thought, crept into the background of Father Silvestro's mind. If this youth was predestinate to create a scandal some day let him at least not do it at San Francesco a Ripa, but . . . anywhere else. Even if he planned, *suadente Diabolo*, to disappear during the journey to Assisi, it might be set down to brigands . . . flood . . . any of the accidents of travelling common in the wilderness of the Papal States—and no convent of the Order would be smirched. The Father Guardian certainly could not spare a Brother to escort him on that long journey. His fate was in his own hands. If he were the child of God he would come safely through his temptations—and he would arrive at Assisi; if he were a member of Satan, who could prevent Satan, sooner or later, from claiming his own? He himself had his own flock to keep from infection. He could not be blamed for following custom in such cases, and starting Brother Deodato off to another convent, where he might be free from his temptations. The rest lay in the counsels of the *Signore Dio*. He even felt glad that, after hesitation, he had given Deodato the name and address of the *avvocato* in London. If he must become a castaway, he might at least find a morsel of bread—the *Padre Guardiano* sighed heart-brokenly at the picture.

Then he looked up briskly. "I cannot let you go to-morrow," he said. "But the day after the Brother Sacristan will be fit to work again, and on that day you may go; I will sign your obedience." A sudden wave of compassion crept over him. "My son, my very dear son!" he pleaded. "You are at a turning-point, perhaps, of your eternal destiny. I implore you think of Him who redeemed you on the bitter Cross, of her whose child-bearing was the opening

of the door of Salvation for you and for all mankind. Entreat His Mercy ; pray for the all-powerful intercession of the *Sedes Sapientiae* ! Kneel with me now, and let us pray together that the Devil with his fiery darts may be driven from the castle of your soul ! ”

Later that afternoon, while finishing his work in the church, and wondering how, without risking the withdrawal of his *obedientia* by indiscipline, he could get a message to the Contessina to say what he had done with her brother, Deodato was told to place a notice of services in the frame outside the church-porch. As he went out to do this, he saw on the very walls of the church, glimmering through the dusk, the red-lettered placards of the pontifical police

“ WANTED ! FIVE HUNDRED SCUDI REWARD !

“ Count Piero Santacroce del Castello, height about five foot, five inches ” (“ Not more than an inch between us ! ” mused Deodato), “ dark brown eyes, black beard ; HAS ONLY ONE HAND, though the mutilation is often concealed by a glove. When last seen wore a yellow paletot over dark clothes. ” (“ The paletot is gone, and ‘ dark clothes ’ are plentiful ! ”)

“ 500 Scudi, ” concluded the proclamation, “ will be paid for information leading to the apprehension of the above, who is charged with criminal attempts against the Head of a friendly State, and with murder. ”

CHAPTER FOUR

IN VILLA PAMFILI

(I)

CONVENT routine the next day seemed to Deodato to be endless. It did not change ; it never changed ; for hundreds of years now nothing had changed it. Why should it alter ? Why should it quicken its lagging pace to suit the desires and sick impatience of his insignificance ? What did the white-washed convent walls, the silent passages, the church with its motionless population of marble and wax, its soft, stuffy dreaminess, the gloomy Choir of the monks behind the High Altar, with its wooden seats and grim-faced stone clock—what did any of these care whether Deodato, the youth without a name, the atom given to God which was daring to withdraw the gift, what did they care whether he went or stayed ? On them he had left no impression—in a year, in fifty, in a hundred they would still be standing to echo the same chants, the same murmured prayers :—

Deus in adiutorium nostrum intende !

Domine ad adjuvandum nos festina !

Beside his own problem, there was the situation of Piero, ill and alone in his dreadful hiding-place, to haunt Deodato at every hour. Suppose when he reached the catacomb to-morrow Piero should have gone from the chapel, wandered impatiently forth into the labyrinth of destruction ? Suppose he should find only a cold body under the cruel eyes of the byzantine Christ ? And there was the Contessina, in her ignorance and suspense, with whom he had found no way of communicating !

After the mid-day dinner a message was sent to him from the Father Guardian to go to his room after night-prayers that evening, to receive his "obedience" and instructions for the journey. Suddenly the long morning seemed a year ago, to belong to a distant past, to have dwindled to a dream.

It was usual in the afternoon for the members of the community to relax and take walks. They went always in twos, and to-day Deodato found himself paired with old Father Egidio, reckoned, no doubt, a safe companion, whose Mass he had been serving just before the vision that had altered his life. In spite of his decrepit looks the venerable friar was a tireless walker, and led the way unhesitatingly up the long, winding avenue to the Janiculum Hill. The February day was warm, and made the heavy habits of the Franciscans oppressive; but the old man, with a dog-like grin wrinkling his ill-shaven cheeks beneath their frosty haze, kept stoutly on the path. On and upwards they climbed, while, seen by glimpses between the trees that fringed the ascent, the pale yellow city, broken by its tufted masses of foliage, spread itself wider and wider to their eyes under a fickle sky, now glinting into blue satin, now veiling itself in nun-like wisps of cloud.

Beside them little *carrozze* crawled up, the horses' heads hanging and bobbing at every step, bearing travellers to see the famous view from the summit, and one or two carriages of the Roman nobility rolled down on their way from the promenade above. From time to time, too, a gaily-hooded winecart flashed past, its blue spokes whirling, its harness-bells ringing. They passed the students of the Germanic College in pairs, a vivid scarlet serpent against the white dust of the roadway; then with a heavy jolting and trampling there came up behind them the coach of a Cardinal, with its crimson panels, its lackeys with powdered heads, and the frail old face of His Eminence nodding within.

At length the façade of San Pietro in Montorio showed through the trees, and on the terrace in front of it they rested a few moments looking down on Rome.

A shrunken mass of brick and stone no longer reaching to the circuit of its ancient walls, it lay below them; and from its Gates the desert, filled with crumbling tombs, ran out to meet the vaporous mountains changing in the fitful light from grey to azure. Up rose in the silence the throng of cupolas and steeples, interspersed with the jagged crowns of half-ruined towers; the brown slabs of the Cæsars' palaces, scored by the black pencils of cypresses, and cloven by giant rents through which the sky gleamed ashen-blue; the pillared circlet of the Colosseum with its shattered flank. The transient sun-rays glimmered on the tips of domes and cornices;

then buried them again in shadow. Above, the faint clouds hung, as though fascinated, over the still expanse of stucco, marble and dark leafage. It seemed as if they could not bring themselves to move from the weird spectacle—the bones of dead imperialism stretched unresisting to the fret of sun and wind, while the bloodless life of the Church pattered over their surface, to the tinkling of Mass bells and the muttering of organs. Here reigned the shadow-show of empire by a phantom court, the mirage of wealth heaped on tombs and altars where no hand dare reach to grasp it ; while a population of beggars dreamed in cynical, tattered dignity upon its lost inheritance, and the heads of a ruling caste self-vowed to sterility fluttered their purple skirts, each for his butterfly's day of place and privilege.

Old Padre Egidio filled in the moments of rest by polishing his spectacles with his red-and-blue checked cotton handkerchief, untroubled, uninterested, seeing before him no change of state, nothing to fear or hope, before the dimly apprehended rewards of his celestial *patria*. Deodato, glancing at him, realised the gulf that had opened between them. He himself, leaning over the parapet, regarded Rome with a tumultuous mixture of feelings—elation, secret dread and a poignant sense of impending severance. He understood what he was leaving ; he could not tell what might be awaiting him. Travel, he had the presentiment, stretched before him, travel beyond the bounds of this Italy where all his life had so far been passed. Phantasmal there rose before his inner eye the obscurely imagined cities of the North—London, buried (he had been told) in its frost and fog, Paris, glittering and crowded, where you could not cross a street without endangering your life ! What could they give to recompense him for the loss of Rome ?

What had they that could replace the wide, empty squares, drowned in a flood of sunshine, where on the hottest days the carved fountains threw up a delicious refreshment, or the colonnaded porticoes, leading by a belt of shadow into the great churches with their temperate atmosphere tinged by the souvenir of spice and candle-wax ? Those friendly churches, with their airy blue cupolas up which the painted angels circled to a painted heaven lit by real sunshine, their pathetic mummies stretched in mitres and hieratic vesture underneath the altars, their shining world of statues over which his Blessed Ludovica reigned as Queen ! How could he bring

himself to forsake that world of loveliness unending—laughing faces of babes disguised as cherubs ; nymphs, half-veiled as Virtues, climbing, sporting, languorously trailing their gleaming limbs over sanctuary steps and round the pedestals of angry Saints, who clutched their crucifixes while their marble eyeballs glared at the unseen ; Bernini's panting, fainting St. Teresa, spiritual sister to his own Ludovica, the elegant, updrawn knees of Giulia Farnese masquerading as Justice on a papal tomb in St. Peter's, the wantoning curls and arms of living flesh waved by the Angels on the altar-rails of Sant' Ignazio !

Sadly Deodato counted over in his own mind all these beloved figures, delicate scornors of the ascetic faith they posed to illustrate. He was sacrificing them all, and the little streets without pavements in which women sat with brown babies in their arms and vivid kerchiefs on their heads, while men with black curls and eyes of liquid umber quarrelled and flung the *morra* stones in the games of their eternal leisure ; where the tiny charcoal stove glowed in winter, and the striped parasol in summer covered the market-stall by the doors of some sculptured courtyard . . . Leaving it all, and going into the shadow !

" Shall we be stirring our bones, little Brother ? " enquired the old friar affectionately, and they continued to mount until they heard above them the Acqua Paola, brawling exultantly into its marble basin. They were just passing the fountain when an open barouche, drawn by two horses, came chinking and grinding up the slope behind them. At the level space by the gushing monument the driver whipped up the horses and began to take the last easy incline towards the summit at a trot.

The carriage went swiftly past the two friars, but not before Deodato, with a throb that seemed to stop his heart, recognised on the cushions at the back the Contessina Ludovica ! Dreaming under her parasol, she had not with her rather short-sighted eyes taken note of the humble Brothers trudging in their sandals through the dust ; and the carriage had rumbled out of sight round a corner before Deodato had been able to think of any sign he dare make—impossible as it would have been for him in any case, in the company of Father Egidio, to do anything so scandalous as to stop a lady's barouche on the Janiculum. And yet there was the message she must have, and she had passed within a few feet without seeing him ! For a moment he felt in despair.

(2)

Silently he let Padre Egidio lead the way through the Porta San Pancrazio and into the grounds of the Villa Pamfili on the plateau just outside the walls. It was another heart-rending farewell, Deodato thought, as they passed under the immense terra-cotta Arch of Triumph marking the entry to the park, and followed the drive round the rim of the dreaming hollow from which rises the Renaissance pavilion of the Pamfili, crowned with friezes and statues. At the foot of the descending garden terraces lay a pool covered with the flat leaves of water-lilies, and lower still the velvety heads of stone-pines spread their awnings in a dell that might have been breathed by the brush of Turner on a pictured landscape. Beyond, the view ran bare to the edge of the plateau, and died on the blue ghosts of the Alban Hills. Seldom inhabited now by the noble family that owned it, the house was shuttered and silent, hiding, it might seem, the court of some Sleeping Beauty, guarded in daytime by the stone fauns and satyrs peeping through the trees, at night by the dank fingers of malaria creeping from the slimy jungle at the foot of the cascades.

"Sleeping Beauty's Palace, indeed!" mused Deodato, while his companion stooped to pluck here and there the herbs which he believed to be medicinal and always gave as remedies to the poor folk of Trastevere. Except for a couple of Dominicans, pacing in their black-and-white habits through the sparse trees of the parkland sweeps behind the house, the place at this hour seemed deserted. The shouts of a few children playing farther down the valley came up to the ear with a long-drawn melancholy. The whole scene seemed to Deodato a parable of his own soul. He too had been bound in an Enchanter's palace, lulled by the opium of dreams in the depths of which lurked Death. Now he had been pricked into life, into danger, adventure . . . starvation, perhaps, for he knew not how he should shift for himself once he had flung the robe of St. Francis aside . . . but still, life with the hope of work, of self-expression . . . perhaps even of love. Yes, even that had entered beckoning into the circle of his visions; in the momentary agitation stirred by the thought he lifted his arm in its heavy, dragging sleeve and pressed his hand against his eyes.

He heard his ears drumming, drew two or three deep breaths, and uncovered his eyes again. There was the same view before them,

but filled now, surely, with a living Voice. It thrilled in the breeze that sounded like the distant sea in a grove of stone-pines perched with scenic art upon a neighbouring knoll. It murmured in the brownish, wintry grass, and sang thinly from the falls dropping away into their fever-haunted tangle in the hollow. The faint hills were there on the horizon still, the tiny copses of the plateau with their mimic ruins and flashes of fountain-foam concealed in thickets, the two Dominicans just retracing their steps. All was there, suspended in time and clothed with eternity, lifted for a moment out of the transient stream, dowered with the antidote to decay and mortality—the little February wind with its chilly caress, the tinkle of water, the plaintive cries of the distant, unseen children. *Numen inerat*. Every colour was softened to pastel, every sound muted to reverence; only the rustle of Father Egidio's sandals brushing down the grass as he searched for his quack remedies had still the harshness of materiality.

Suddenly behind Deodato sounded the scrunching of gravel, the clop-clop of carriage-horses, the whirl of wheels. He turned sharply, and saw Ludovica again. This time he faced her directly as the barouche went by, and she recognised him. He saw her start, the pale-brown eyes dilate, and her mouth open. The equipage passed him, churning up some gravel round his bare ankles, and the horses disappeared round the curve of the hollow from which the house rises. There they stopped, and after several minutes Deodato, with beating heart, saw a footman coming towards him along the drive.

He was an old man, liveried in a long coat and tall hat, with white hair and a face like a benevolent, wizened monkey. As he drew near and raised his hat to the *Frate*, Father Egidio, amazed at the encounter, shambled over the grass to hear, his hands filled with wild flowers, his lower lip hanging.

"The Contessina Santacroce del Castello," said the old man with the easy courtesy of the Italian servant, "sends me, *Frate*, to remind you that she uttered the wish to make a donation to your church yesterday morning, but, as she told you, found she had left her purse at home. She desires you now to accept this offering for the Bread of St. Anthony and the Holy Souls." He held out as he spoke a small leather purse, and placed it in Deodato's bewildered fingers. Then, raising his hat again with a touch of deference not overdone (for these were but *Frate*), he turned to make his way

back to where the hood of the barouche was just visible among the trees at the curve of the drive. But before making his dignified withdrawal he had for just a second allowed a gleam to escape from the depths of his small black eyes—a gleam that spoke warning, attention, and the reminder of a secret shared to the young Brother.

Deodato at once understood, so perfect had been the fleeting pantomime. He drew the ring from the purse and dipped his fingers into it. They touched coins and then the corners of a folded note. He dropped this back into the purse, while he displayed the coins, a couple of gold ones flashing among them, to the astounded gaze of Padre Egidio.

"Ahi! ahi!" ejaculated the old man, "there is a devout lady! But who is she, and how comes she to make her alms in so unusual a fashion?"

Deodato told him briefly of the Contessina's visit to the church the day before to see the statue. "And I suppose," he concluded, "that she wished to show her gratitude to God who had given her a Holy Woman in her family, and desiring to spare herself another walk along Trastevere, she took the opportunity of meeting us to make her offering through my hands."

"We had better return at once," said Padre Egidio in a hushed tone. "It is not safe to be in these wild parts with so much treasure!"

"We are safe until sunset," answered Deodato. "Finish gathering your herbs, *Padre mio*."

The old man dubiously agreed, and as he turned his back to resume his botanical search, Deodato crossed the drive to the wall that overhangs the sunken road to the city, and leaning over it as if looking at the distant view of St. Peter's, secretly withdrew the note from the purse.

"For the love of God, *Frate*," (it ran) "tell me what has become of him, where you have hidden him. I must see him—you, too, if I can—before he departs from Rome. Inside the city I am followed if I go out on foot, but I fancy I can ride anywhere outside: they believe he is still within the Gates. You to whom I owe so much already, try by all means to send some message to me!"

"L. S. del C."

Deodato surveyed her pencilled signature in a kind of rapture ; then, tucking the note within his habit, set his brains to work. She wished to meet him and Piero. Why should they not all three meet to-morrow morning, when her brother had been freed, before parting on their respective roads. Could she not without suspicion ride out along the Via Appia to where, beyond the Basilica of St. Sebastian, it ran deserted, lined with shattered tombs, towards Albano ?

Yes : the plan grew more precise. Some three miles beyond the church, a lane branched off, close by a square, carved sepulchre, an easy landmark to identify, and passed under the brown arches of the Claudian Aqueduct. He had been there more than once with other boys on a school-holiday ramble. Let them all three meet, under one of the arches of the aqueduct ; the time mid-day, when any peasants working in the vicinity would have returned to their hovels for their meal. There would be, of course, a spice of danger. Some prowling patrol of the papal *carabinieri* might come cantering over the billows of the plain and catch them at their rendezvous . . . but the chance was a very small one. About as great as that of winning first prize in the lottery with a single ticket ! And they would see them coming far off from the shelter of the arch. The place would not be a trap for surprises like a pit or a quarry.

Yes : how good it would be for the three of them to meet a last time. For her it would be consolation ; for Piero, surely, happiness, and perhaps the chance of receiving advice and money from his sister ; for him, Deodato—he could find no thoughts to sum up all that it would mean for him ! He found the stump of a drawing-pencil he was rarely without, and scrawled at the foot of her note—he had no other paper—“ To-morrow, at noon precisely ; Aqua Claudia ; 50th arch south of the road that turns off from the Via Appia at Curtius’ square tomb with the three dying Loves.”

(3)

As they re-entered Trastevere together Deodato said boldly to his ancient mentor, “ Should we not restore to the Contessina her purse ? We cannot drop it into the box with the money. Perhaps she values it after all. Will you permit me, Father, to enter Palazzo Benucci to give the purse to her servant for her ? ”

Father Egidio stroked his bristly chin, a little worried. "It is against rule for you to enter a house without me, little Brother."

"Only into the porch-way, then!"

"Good! I shall be watching from the street," and the old man gave his dog-like grin, as if to assure the Brother that his strictness did not imply any real suspicion.

After passing through the columns of the main entry to the *palazzo*, Deodato was stopped by the porter, whom he prayed to send for Benedetta, meaning to give the purse to her only. The delay was unfortunate; for while he waited for Ludovica's maid to be fetched, he saw the splendid porter, with his cocked hat and long, gilt mace, hurry out into the roadway, and salute with deep deference as a shabby *carrozza* pulled up at the door. Out of it stepped a short, dapper man with greying chin-tuft and moustaches. He paid off the driver with parsimonious care, and Deodato felt the force of his personality from a distance as he came stepping briskly through the arched entry, his hands behind his back, his chin working underneath his beard, his little, dark eyes darting round and round, and seeming to pierce into every corner.

In a moment these suspicious eyes under bushy brows that retained their blackness fell on the Brother, and without pleasure. "Who is that fellow, and what is he doing here?" rapped out the little gentleman. "Guiseppe?" to the porter in the cocked hat, "who is this *Fratónzolo*?"

"I do not know, *Signor Conte*," answered the functionary humbly. "He asked for the Contessina's servant . . . Speak for yourself, *Frate*!" he added in a low tone. "Don't you know it is the Count Santacroce del Castello?"

Ludovica's father! Deodato stared at him aghast, and the Count returned the stare with anger. He was in an extremely bad temper, for he had just come from an interview with Monsignor the Governor of Rome, and the outward suavity of that sharp-faced prelate in the purple stockings had not sweetened the searching cross-examination the Count had been forced to undergo about the misdeeds and probable whereabouts of his crazy son. It was bad enough to see his name placarded all over Rome without this insulting ordeal as well! And on top of it he had had to pay a *carrozza*, as his daughter had gone out in the barouche!

"Well, *Fratricello*!" he asked sardonically, "I hope you will recognise me when next I have the distinguished pleasure of meeting

you? What may be your business with the Contessina? . . . She is far too fond of gentlemen of the Church . . . That madman Gioberti!" he added with an ideological snort.

This was Greek to the little Brother, whose reading had not been encouraged to include the celebrated, slightly heterodox Catholic philosopher of Piedmont. "I came, *Signor Conte*," he answered meekly, "to restore to the Contessina, through her servant, her purse."

"Did you steal it, then?" The bushy brows went up. The lean lips wrinkled in a smile under the moustaches.

Deodato flushed. "The Contessina was good enough to send in it an offering for the convent of San Francesco. We could not dream of retaining her purse as well."

"Throwing away the handle after the blade, eh? She is lucky to get anything back from a convent . . . you will concede that yourself, eh, my friend? Give me the purse then. I will restore it to my daughter, and tell her not to be so free with it another time."

He held out his hand, while Deodato stood frozen with terror.

"*Ebbene!*" ejaculated the Count, snapping his bony fingers. "Have you repented so soon of your generosity?"

There was nothing to do but to hand over the Contessina's purse to her father. To refuse, even to hesitate, would be to bring about an exposure of the whole plot. Deodato could only pray that the old gentleman would restore it to his daughter without poking those hard fingers of his into the little inner pocket where the note was lodged. For the moment he was weighing it in his hand. "I wonder how much it contained," he grumbled. "Insane extravagance! If your St. Anthony can find everybody else's property for them, why cannot he discover gold mines for himself?" His mouth opened abruptly in a loud laugh, displaying gleaming white teeth. Then, to Deodato's immense relief, he thrust the purse carelessly into his tail-pockets, and withdrew his hand to plunge it deep into his trousers. "There," he said extricating, as if after a desperate struggle, a couple of copper *baiocchi*. "Give that to St. Anthony with a prayer for *me!*" and with a sudden, good-natured smile, passed on with his quick, pouncing step, like a man about to break at every pace into a run, his head still darting from side to side. Deodato lost no time in rejoining Padre Egidio, whose peevish remonstrances over his prolonged stay inside the palace accompanied him all the way to the convent.

At night prayers, sitting for the last time with the other lay-brothers in the choir behind the altar, Deodato was assailed even more overwhelmingly than during his farewells to Rome that afternoon, by the subduing realisation that he was indeed about to leave the only home he had known. The solemn, spaced murmur of the Fathers' voices seemed to weigh on him with the reminder that the span of life to which he was so feverishly looking forward was but a drop in the ocean of eternity. The stillness, the sombreness of these walls, drenched in the unending spray of psalmody and intercession, were a foil to the bright trinkets of his hope. And it seemed to him that in whatever corner of the world he found himself, there would always be one fragment of his mind that would stay enclosed within this dusty choir, with its tattered office books and dim Stations of the Cross.

When he tapped on the door of the Father Guardian's room and entered it, he saw Padre Silvestro look up from a sheet upon which he was writing with just a second's look of bewilderment. With an unreasonable jet of egoism Deodato resented the disclosure that for the moment the Guardian had forgotten him in more important matters. However he had soon found upon his desk and handed to the departing Brother his *obedientia* and a private letter about him to the Father Guardian of the convent of St. Mary of the Angels at Assisi. "Take good care of these papers," he cautioned him. "Remember that if you cannot show your 'obedience' you may be arrested in any place as a *monachus vagus*!" He paused with a faint look of warning kindness. "And we are not asking you," he continued with his wheezy chuckle, "to travel on foot and beg your way from convent to convent like our forerunners in the Holy Rule. No! you will have your seat in the *diligenza* . . . here is the number of it . . . and all your charges paid beforehand . . . So, at least," he chuckled again, you can travel apostolically without money . . . which, indeed, for a friar, is usually but a temptation to irregularity." Again that significant pause, and look of warning, almost entreaty, through the thick glasses! "And now," he concluded, "let us kneel down together and I will say a prayer . . . a fervent, fervent prayer, my child . . . to God, to His Blessed Mother, to our glorious Founder and to St. Anthony, that you may be kept free from peril of body and soul throughout your journey, *a sagitta volante in die, a negotio perambulante in tenebris, ab incursu et daemonio meridiano*.

As Deodato went out from the Father Guardian's presence at the end of his long, sincere supplication, he caught a glimpse of Padre Silvestro taking up his pen again and knitting his brows once more over the important document he was composing. And he realised with another unreasonable revolt of his egoism how small his importance was in this numerous community. He had been a bolt or nut in the machinery of this religious House. He had revealed a defect, and he had been thrown out to be repaired—if it was possible. And already no one was thinking any more about him. The great machine of devotion was moving forward without him, puffing and grinding, like a spiritual locomotive dragging its passengers, pell-mell and willy-nilly, devout or careless, grumbling or satisfied, mystical or practical, eager or disillusioned, all alike along the rails to their heavenly terminus.

CHAPTER FIVE

THREE—TO MEET AGAIN?

(I)

THE morning sun had risen to its full strength, turning a misty sky that had brooded at day-break over the campagna into a deep-blue curtain overhanging the gorges of Tivoli. To the right of this view the ancient Via Appia ran its arrow-course southwards, and down its deserted paving of black lava-blocks strode the figure of a friar, his hood drawn over his head against the sharp wind blowing from these eastern heights. His habit seemed drawn up rather high round his ankles, and in two places he had cut the thongs of his leather sandals to give room to his toes. There was an incongruity, too, between the ruthless, long strides, and the hooded head and hands meekly hidden under the hanging sleeves of the brown Franciscan gown. Unflinchingly, however, the figure strode on, and an aged labourer hobbling past, a hoe upon his shoulder, uncovered and cried some words of salutation.

The friar stopped dead in the middle of the road. "What is it? What was that you said?" he demanded in a hoarse, imperious voice, and the terrified old peasant found himself looking under the hood at a pale and sunken face, the lips and chin covered with stiff black bristles. He bowed low, crumpling his rag of a felt hat in his hands, and wished he had not cried greetings to this very unusual *Frate*—a gentleman plainly, and possibly a demon to boot, or a *lupo mannaro*, a were-wolf, returning to his tomb upon the highway after a night's hunting.

"I did but say '*Buon giorno, Frate!*'" he pleaded, "and I desired," a note of doubt crept into his voice, "your reverence's holy prayers on my behalf."

"Do not bow to me, man," answered the harsh, hoarse voice, "nor call me 'reverend'—I am but your brother!"

"*Sicuro, Frate!*" answered the old man, cheerfully misunderstanding.

"And where do you work for your pittance of starvation?" enquired the *Frate*, lingering, as if against his better judgment, on his path.

"*Sicuro, sicuro!*" The old man nodded. "Times are bad, but, certainly very bad, *cattivissimi!* One is almost starved. *Ma, che volete?*" He gave a curiously sweet smile from his toothless mouth and the hundred dirt-encrusted wrinkles of his face. "What can you do?" he repeated. "The good God will take pity in his own time!"

The friar appeared to be about to make a violent rejoinder; but checked himself, though the terrified peasant saw the corner of his fleshy, tormented lips lift like a baited dog's. Assuredly there was something not good about this encounter on the lonely road among the sepulchres of the dead . . . nor was this in the least like any *Frate* the old fellow had ever seen.

"Brother in misery," said the stranger at length in a voice of which the vibrations lingered in the old man's unwilling memory for the rest of his short span of days, "brother in misery, learn to rely on your own arm, your own mind for help! From elsewhere none will come. Keep these words of mine in your heart; speak them to your children and your grandchildren! But do not, as you set store by your life, as you set store," he sneered gratingly, "by your 'immortal soul,' divulge to any living being who you met this morning and from whom you learned this lesson!"

"But certainly, *Signor Diavolo!*" answered the labourer, shaking all over, "I will not dare to disobey you."

"Take this, then!" The friar opened his folded arms in a brusque gesture, and as he did so the old man uttered a cry of fear and tottered backwards. He had perceived when the sleeve of the friar's habit flew back, that in place of his left hand the demoniac visitant had only the stump of an arm.

"Pick it up, then, if you will not take it!" shouted the friar, and a little shower of silver and copper coins spun upon the black pavement. The ancient peasant, after one glance of incredulous ecstasy, bent himself with rheumatic groanings, and sprawled on the road, collecting and secreting on different parts of his person a windfall such as he had never dreamed of. "*Grazie! Grazie mille! Tante grazie, Signor Diavolo!*" he kept mumbling.

When at length he clambered painfully to his feet again, the ancient Way was empty. With shaded eyes he looked north and

south; the road ran straight in either direction without a figure moving on it. Wizardry beyond a doubt! The old man was still pondering and scratching his head when he heard a sharp trot of horses behind him, and looked round, to be thrown into a fresh terror.

Two *carabinieri*, stately and terrifying in their long, spurred boots and clinking accoutrements, had drawn up on their powerful black horses, and were studying him.

"Come here, you!" shouted one of them roughly. "*Subito!* Speak! Has anyone passed you on this road this morning?"

The old man shook his bent head, his jaws working soundlessly.

"A man with one hand. D'you hear?" demanded the other as harshly.

The peasant shook his head with vehemence. "No, *Signori*, no!" he asseverated, telling himself that *Il Signor Diavolo* would easily prove a match for the *carabinieri*, and that he could not afford to incur the vengeance of such a potentate.

The policemen stood in their stirrups, searching the road, the fields beside it and the horizon. Then they conferred together, and wheeling their horses, retraced their steps, to turn off at a by-road some quarter of a mile nearer the city. The old man shouldered his hoe, and hobbled chuckling on his way.

As soon as he dipped out of sight in a fall of the road, the friar scrambled out of the hiding-place into which he had slipped at the ruined base of a pyramidal tomb screened with ivy, and began to stride forward again with the same long, scythe-like steps. After another hour or so he struck aside to the left down a lane that sank rapidly between banks.

(2)

At about the same time that the *carabinieri* were questioning the aged peasant, a solitary young man was making a wide half-circle across the campagna to the south-west of the Basilica of St. Sebastian, keeping a lively eye open for chance observers of his course, though so far he had only encountered a goat, which cantered to the top of a knoll and thrust its beard forward at him like an inquisitive Yankee.

Had any human wanderer passed this young man he would surely have been struck by the clean-cut, aristocratic look of the face beneath

the tumbled blue-black hair. The sculptured nostrils were drawing in the keen desert air with delight ; the long, subtle mouth was set in a determined line, with the ghost of a smile from time to time quivering at the corners ; the blue-grey eyes shone large with suppressed excitement.

And if the face was that of a gentleman, so were the clothes, though somewhat travel-stained and even frayed in places. The sleeves might lie a trifle long on the wrists, the trousers fall a little low on the boot even for the fashion of that day—nevertheless these clothes fitted Deodato better than ever his friar's habit had done. There was a spiritual congruity about them that seemed like a reagent to have precipitated the new man ; his very walk, a lithe, springy step was altered from the prim marching-pace of conventual discipline. He was conscious of this : his newly won freedom was dancing in his veins ; if he had thought it safe he would have danced and sung with it. Now if Padre Silvestro could have seen him, he would have marked beyond mistake that satyric rapture, innocent but heady, which he had suspected in his difficult lay-brother. Deodato was drinking in with joy every line and tint of the landscape through which he moved—the glimpses of the crenellated towers of Rome, the white specks of the little towns on the flanks of the distant hills, the green billowings of the plain in which he was engulfed. Once, coming on the fragment of a carved figure on a tomb, he felt it over lovingly with his hands.

Deodato was thankful indeed to rest his mind after the strain of the morning. It would fill another book to recount his shifts and perils since he had left the convent at seven, carrying little but a razor and scissors and a rosary, ostensibly to proceed to the Porta del Popolo, there to take his seat in the diligence travelling north. How, once across the Tiber, he had begged a lift in a friendly wine-cart that had carried him safely through Porta San Sebastiano, where his passage was still accepted as part of a familiar convent routine. How, on reaching the Basilica of St. Sebastian, he had crept through the empty church again, seizing the moment when the old Brother Sacristan was noisily knocking about with a broom and pail behind the High Altar, had slipped down into the catacomb, and found Piero, to his relief, in better health for the hours of rest he had spent sleeping or poring in the faint bluish light over a pocket text of Leopardi. How he had dressed him in the friar's garb, cut and shaved a tonsure on him, told him how to walk, how to hood himself and how to hide

his wrists in the long sleeves. How, after cautioning him, if he met a Friar to bow only, and if a layman to murmur *Dominus tecum*! he had led him to the corridor opening at its end upon the stair, and listened with all his ears to hear whether he made the transit of the vaulted room out into the garden unchallenged.

He himself then had waited in Piero's clothes until the first party of visitors had filed through the catacomb, and had joined on to their line; afterwards passing out, with Piero's hat over his brows and Piero's silk handkerchief held solicitously over his mouth against the chill air of the corridors below, under the incurious eye of the escorting friar, who had, fortunately, never seen Brother Deodato before. . . .

Now there was nothing left of Brother Deodato but the scapular which had been found attached to his shoulders when he was picked up before the altar of San Francesco, the little square of linen and cloth, sewed together and marked with a sacred emblem, which he had continued to wear all his life under his clothing, and could not bring himself to part with even at this moment of changing his personality. He hoped, as he swung to his left, considering he had circled far enough to throw possible pursuers off his scent, that Piero had fitted as well into the character of friar as he had into that of layman. He could not help feeling a doubt, so indomitably, almost crazily, obstinate was Ludovica's wild brother. Had he not wasted precious moments of the early morning when he had the chance of passing out of the catacomb before the coming and going of visitors began, by lingering in the chapel below to tell Deodato, "The Church to which *you* belong rose from these places under the ground to snatch the crown of the Caesars. To-day, *Fraticello*, you are releasing from under this ancient Latian soil a spirit of another kind—one that will liberate men at any cost . . . if needful by spilling seas of blood. Ugh!" He had made a wry face and spat at his own words, and the dropping of his spittle had made a cold smack on the stone floor which had given Deodato a pricking at the roots of his hair. The sibilant voice whispering in the dark had seemed to him just for a moment not the voice of this one man only, but a murmur of countless thousands, prisoners of all the earth, waiting their hour, not pleading for freedom, but proclaiming they would shortly break their gaol and turn the tables on their persecutors.

Yes, even now, as he hastened towards the rendezvous, with the warmth of the sun on his face and penetrating all his limbs, under

the gay sky and in the invigorating little breezes, Deodato felt again that chill and apprehension. It was as though the ground over which he walked, brushing through the long grasses and thistles, striking his feet against the small barren stones, was undermined in secret. Undermined not merely by the cemeteries of the Christian Confessors, but by some strange new Church with destruction as its creed !

Suddenly he saw ahead of him, over a long undulation, a sight that drove these speculations from his mind. It was the arches of the ancient aqueduct shining brown in the sun, so far away that they looked like a child's game of bricks on a rumpled green tablecloth. It was the meeting place—and already she might be there !

(3)

Further south the sun gleamed on the chalky new walls of the Basilica of St. Paul, rebuilding after its recent fire. It stood outside the city on the edge of a forlorn region, rimmed by marshes towards the sea, in which no tree thrived, no dwelling of even the meanest herdsman dotted the bleak and soggy soil, for it was death to linger after sunset here in the very heart of the malaria fiend's kingdom.

Yet over this, too, the morning sun was throwing its illusive enchantment and the great luminous tent of the Roman sky was stretched in splendour as a woman came galloping past from Porta San Paolo on a largely-framed chestnut horse. Her long green riding-skirt floated out in a cloud from the horse's sweating flank, as she urged him forward with slight sounds from between her parted scarlet lips ; her plumed hat of dark felt, tied round her throat with a cord, had fallen back upon her neck, offering her golden bands of hair to the recognition of the sun. As she put up a gauntleted hand to set the hat in place again, the fretful horse swerved at some fancied peril in the grass. Down came the long fingers with supple power upon the reins, compelling it back to its course. The chestnut snorted, bucked, and plunged forward at a racing pace. Ludovica bent like a firmly-rooted young tree to meet the plunging ; then her firm hands pulled the horse together, and set it to a steady gallop again. With its powerful chest, flying mane, palpitating nostril and long, rippling tail, it looked in its excitement like one of the chargers that ramp round the Renaissance fountains of Rome, bearing

on its back an allegorical Goddess. The two made a single jet of life in the barren wilderness; contending for mastery they seemed to impart each to each the quiver of the other's energy. The woman at once impelled and restrained the beast; the beast supplied fresh fire to the rider who tamed him.

On the couple swept, Ludovica sitting with the unsought, unconscious skill that marked her in all bodily exercises, her eyes gazing eagerly ahead in quest of landmarks as she swung to the east. At length black pines and tombs showed her approach to the Appian Way.

She slowed her mount to breathe him; walked him along the hard blocks of the road till, peering from her saddle, she made out the tomb of the three dying Loves that Deodato had indicated for landmark; then gave him rein again, till the arches of the aqueduct came into view. Larger and larger they grew as she cantered towards them, until they strode overhead like the legs of a legion of giants. She pulled up, to count their number from the lane beside which she had been riding; then came at last to the foot of a superb reddish-brown arch, underneath which two figures, dwarfed by its sweep, stood waiting for her.

For a moment Ludovica was a little confused when he whom she had taken for her brother ran forward to take her rein, and revealed himself as an unknown youth with dancing eyes and tumbled black hair. . . . Then quickly she understood the substitution. This was the demure lay-brother—she remembered now that flash of white teeth—and the friar over yonder, leaning moodily against the brick-work of the arch, was Piero. Touching Deodato's shoulder lightly with her hand, as he stood in rather awkwardly to help her dismount, she sprang from the saddle, and ran straight to her brother. Throwing her arms round his neck, she kissed and caressed him, fondling his injured arm with cries of compassion, and murmuring endearments with her cheek laid against his and her golden curls brushing his lips.

He showed little response, merely asking in a sharp, dry voice whether she had brought any money. She drew a small packet from her hip-pocket, and he smiled grimly, saying, "This will be my preserver between here and the Grand Duke's frontier, this and your jewels, if I get a chance to sell them. Your *papalino* genuflects to the good God, but prostrates himself before the great *Scudo*."

Ludovica asked him in quick, breathless sentences what his plans were, by what route he meant to travel, how he hoped to cross the frontier with only a friar's "obedience" directing him upon Assisi. But he was provokingly brief and non-committal in his answers. It was as though he were careless what became of him, or too bored to make a coherent plan at all.

Ludovica, however, put a different sense upon his reticence, and presently cut him short, saying, "So you have come to mistrust me, too, now, Piero! Is that the truth? You will not confide your plans even to your sister!"

Piero shrugged his shoulders. "A woman can never be discreet."

Her pallor gave place to pink; her eyes darkened with anger. "I have been discreet enough, I think, since you have been hiding in Rome. I have played my part without a fault."

He lifted his brows in a sardonic slant. "Your part? My dear, you have been a mere figurante. My *Fraticello* here snatched the big rôle."

"That is true!" cried Ludovica, turning swiftly about. "We owe everything . . . everything . . . to the *Frate*, and neither of us speaks a word of thanks!"

Deodato's eyes rested for an instant on the column of her throat, rising from the turned-down white collar at the top of her gold-buttoned, green bodice. Then he lifted them to her face with its peculiar pale glow like light shining through alabaster, and his eyes met hers.

"Pray, Contessina," he pleaded, "do not any longer call me '*Frate*,' I have abandoned the habit—for ever!"

"Ah!" Piero seemed interested in him for the first time. "You have had a flash of reason, have you? You are not going back at all! You have actually struck a blow for your own freedom! Well, but how far do you mean to go?"

"You are leaving Religion?" The Contessina's arched brows drew together in a painful anxiety. "It is a terrible step to be taking."

Piero laughed discordantly. "That is the way, Ludovica! Drive him back to the leading strings of Mother Church! You are a fine Revolutionary, you! You are blacker than the Blacks!"

Her eyes flashed with annoyance as she replied. "I have never called myself a revolutionary, as you know, Piero. A patriot, yes! But I do not share your ideas."

"That is no news to me, *sorellina mia*! You are frightened, that is the sum of it. You want one foot in the camp of Freedom and one within the altar-rails! You will do no service to either party, let me tell you."

"And I do not believe in parties, either," she answered more calmly. "There is one Italy and one God, and no conflict in serving both."

Piero turned aside with an exasperated laugh. "This boy listens to you and thinks you are insane."

"I think nothing of the kind about the Signorina," interjected Deodato. "It was she herself said to me two days ago, 'There are many mansions.'"

Ludovica's disturbed look came again. "But where are you going, Fr... Signor?" she asked. "What plans have you? Have you any means for the journey?"

Deodato blushed. He wished to conceal his pennilessness from her. "I shall do very well, I thank you," he answered.

"What nonsense!" snorted Piero. "If you have fled from a convent, you have fled without a *baiocco*." Irritably he ripped open the covering of the packet in which his sister had enclosed what money she had been able to get together for him. "Here!" he said, holding it out. "Take what you want! Take it all! You have earned the share of a Carbonaro!"

Deodato protested; the other two urged him to accept, and there was a minute's clamour of voices, Ludovica's dominating with its vehement contralto. At length Deodato, overcome by her energy, consented to accept five gold pieces from the small store, promising boldly that he would repay them some day, and requesting her address in Turin to write to.

"And have you any passport, any papers?" pursued Ludovica not yet satisfied.

Deodato stammered a little. "That was what I was about to ask the *Signor Conte*. He has, I believe, a passport made out in the name of an Englishman, which he judges it would be dangerous for him to use."

"You think you would pass as an English gentleman?" demanded Piero, with his creased, ironical smile.

Deodato flushed darkly again. "I have some knowledge of the English tongue," he murmured, "sufficient, with the help of a gold piece, to bear out the passport, in a Neapolitan guard-house."

"And the bearing of a gentleman," said Ludovica, with a ceremonious little bend of her neck, intended, he saw, as a formal reparation for her brother's rudeness. Swiftly he caught the bare hand in which she was holding a glove and raised it to his lips; then took a step, almost a spring, backwards, again suggestive of the young satyr in a movement of sylvan timidity. But there was a spark of resentment in his eyes, as he marked, out of the corner of them, Piero's creased smile deepen into that hostile, gargoyle-like derision, before he tossed over "Charles MacSweeney's" passport.

Ludovica did not notice this interchange. She had been reflecting painfully with her eyes on the ground. Now she looked up with a sigh. "It is time to part," she said in a heart-broken voice, gathering up her skirt. "It cannot be safe to linger here together." She ran to her brother and caught his hand in both hers. "Oh! Piero! Piero! my dear little brother," she sobbed, "take care of yourself! Do not run madly into every danger—you so ill and with your poor arm in that state!—you know how you make me suffer!"

"I shall be safe enough," he replied with a roughness faintly tinged by affection. "When I get into the wild country near the Northern border of his Holiness's earthly paradise, I shall find smugglers who will help me across. And there are friends of the cause in Tuscany in plenty."

"I have written three letters for you in that packet. All good men——"

"Who never give trouble to anyone, eh? Well, I do not care for your 'good men'! I prefer stout hearts like Mazzini, who does not delude himself that revolutions can be made with prayers and goody books and the allurements of goldy locks for young fools!" He grasped roughly at her hair; held a shining strand of it for an instant in his begrimed thumb and finger; then let it fall with a contemptuous exclamation. Deodato, watching with what uncomplainingness she twisted the momentarily raped lock back into its place, understood how much she had schooled herself to endure at the hands of this brother of hers.

It was plain she was not thinking of any such petty indignity as, with wet eyes and cheeks that had gone even paler than usual, she took Piero's single hand again in hers. "This is farewell," she murmured; and then with a sudden gesture held out one of her hands and caught Deodato's. "Three friends!" she said, "I wonder when and where we shall meet again?"

Silence answered her words, broken only by the wistful rustle of the grasses as the wind shrilled through the arch without intelligence or purpose. Deodato stood trembling, his eyes fixed upon Ludovica, striving to imprint upon his mind every detail of her face, every line of her form. He had made just such a station of devotion in front of the marble Beata early this morning, before finally quitting the Church of San Francesco. Now he was filling in the picture—the only talisman, he told himself, which he possessed to bear him through the world which at this moment seemed so dark and terrifying. . . .

Five minutes later Ludovica was sitting alone upon her horse under the arch, sobbing into her handkerchief, while the chestnut, with the reins held loose on his neck, made a tearing sound as he cropped the herbage.

(4)

When at length she began her solitary homeward ride, Ludovica's thoughts ran almost wholly on her brother. Warm as her gratitude was to the young friar who had so inexplicably dropped from the clouds to aid them, he was to her too puzzling a personality for her mind at the moment to take him in. She had nothing of the coquette in her nature, and was free from that exclusive preoccupation with love which dominated the still almost harem existence of the ordinary Italian woman. If she could not be blind to the boy's admiration for her, expressed so plainly at first sight in the church, and again when he had pressed his trembling lips to her hand for the second time on taking his final farewell of her to-day, she read it as a boyish homage—which she felt she had not earned. There was nothing otherwise troubling about the friendliness of a youth whom she still found it hard to divest in her mind of his monastic character.

But how much there was to trouble and preoccupy her in Piero! Youngest of a family of six (of whom two had died in infancy), he seemed to have grown up with an obscure grudge against life. He had not been born with any deformity, any weakness of limb or constitution to sour him—only a person of wiry strength could have faced the fatigues of the last few days as he had done, just after healing from a serious mutilation. In childhood he had not suffered more teasing than was usual from elder brothers and

sisters ; parental discipline had been no sterner for him than it was for all at the period. Yet he seemed at fixed feud with all his family, except Ludovica, who had had a special fondness for him since they were children. Perhaps she handled him better than the others did for having, quite early, divined the secret of his self-dramatisation. He had first, under the petty rubs and humiliations of life, built himself up as a figure of pity, and had then identified himself with all the suffering, merited or unmerited, he met on his path or read of in books. He made himself the advocate of every down-trodden creature, retaliating with all the fury that the victim should have shown, but so often did not. His thirst for vengeance upon life was thus fiercely intensified ; his personal enemies vicariously multiplied a thousandfold ; his opportunities for revenge proportionately increased.

Ludovica, to whom sympathy was as instinctive as antipathy was to her brother, was wounded in the deepest part of her by Piero's cynicism and blighting contempt for life. She struggled desperately to lead him out of it, and was drawn nearer to him in pitying love from the very repulsion she felt for so much that was in his nature. The thirst for self-immolation had risen in her almost before she came to the age of reason, and Piero was to hand as the first object of this passion. She made it her mission to save him from himself, and caught eagerly at the hollow dream of universal brotherhood with which, dramatising himself once more as a world-saviour, he justified the ferocity of his attacks upon society. Again she was almost alone in divining that deep in the core of him, beneath the wrappings of wounded vanity, congenital bitterness and resentful anger, there lay a vein of genuine compassion with the suffering race of men. Few others could detect this ultimate, pathetic sincerity in the insufferable youth, and least of all could the Count his father.

Adalberto Santacroce del Castello was an ardent Italian patriot of the constitutional type. He was the intimate of Cavour, who was a frequent visitor at his town and country houses, of the volatile Rattazzi, and of the gruff Baron Ricasoli, who came from Florence to conspire for the liberation of Tuscany. Italy free and united under the King of Piedmont, Victor Emmanuel, was the creed of all these Liberals, and nothing was so maddening to the irritable old noble as to find his younger son plunging into the extravagances of Mazzini and the Red Republic. He cursed the day when the boy had fallen under the spell of the grave, bearded fanatic with his

sweet smile and murderous doctrines ; he wished a thousand times he had never paid that visit to England in Piero's childhood, during which the arch-conspirator had walked the boy up and down the river-bank by rural Chelsea, his hand pressed on his shoulder, while his deep voice tremulously poured out his philanthropy of the dagger and the bomb, his vision of universal peace rising from a whirlpool of blood, his dream of a world brotherhood under the primacy of Italian nationalism. He had spoiled Piero for life, was the father's verdict, and he had felt his presentiments justified when Piero became involved with Mazzini in a crazy attempt to seize a coastal fort near Genoa, and was sent out of the country by Cavour, to spare his life and his father's name. Bad enough ! But that his son should now have joined in the criminal folly of Orsini, that sinister fanatic bred in the secret society of the Carbonari, was almost enough to make Adalberto renounce him with a formal curse !

Indeed the Count would complain that his family had all disappointed him. His eldest son Cesare had shown no aptitude either for politics or for the army. He had instead devoted himself with a passionate love of the land to the care of the family estates round Castello della Santa Croce, approaching in tastes, talk and dress year by year more closely to the farmer. The old Count's quirks and sarcasms at his eldest son's expense ignored the truth that, but for Count Cesare's untiring labours with their vines, their mulberries and their cattle, the family would by now be bankrupt. Adalberto, though parsimonious himself as a peasant in all personal matters, spent money freely on his political aims. On his coffers Cavour constantly relied for the funds to pay those secret services that even the tolerant Piedmontese parliament would never have sanctioned as part of the official expenditure of the State. Such were the corruption of consciences, the purchase of the honour of confidential servants of foreign governments, the decking out of courtesans' bodies to enslave Ministers and potentates, the subsidising of the Press all over Europe, the continuous fabrication by reptile pens of legends damaging to Austria, the King of Naples and the Pope, all the bubbling and evil-smelling back-kitchen of politics from which the bland, Pickwickian-looking Minister, personally incorruptible, honourable, and self-denying as a saint, hoped to produce the elixir that should one day bring together the dismembered limbs of Italy.

Nevertheless Adalberto was wont to grumble, "I have one son a rustic, the second a scoundrel; one daughter a nun—it is true it is all Maria was fit for—and the other a visionary who can't get herself married!" Of his wife he said nothing, having an internal as well as an external respect for the silent, dark-haired woman who had brought him a good dowry and ungroaningly done her duty by bearing him six children, who never criticised, if she never approved, his political ideas, listened with a marble expression to the anticlerical quirks of the cherubic-faced Cavour and his sympathisers round her table, and took no more drastic remedies than a stately walk in her black silk dress to the whitewashed village church of Castello della Santa Croce to set up a votive candle, or a drive behind her slow-stepping carriage horses through the streets of Turin, scoured by Alpine winds, to visit her Jesuit confessor.

A less impatient man would have realised that in his younger daughter Ludovica he had a child with a real affinity to himself. But, nourished on Voltaire, though retaining a profound vein of superstition, the old Count, a professed anticlerical, thought that Ludovica spoilt all her patriotism by mixing it with religion. She had imbibed the ideas of Liberal priests like Gioberti and Lamennais through the influence of her confessor, who had also been her mother's, a certain Canon Visconti, of aristocratic origin and democratic ideas; and when she spoke with burning eyes to her father of an Italy united under the presidency of the Pope, or of the Catholic Church as the appointed champion of the people, he thought her nearly as mad as his son Piero.

Meditating these familiar problems of her family life, now likely to be exacerbated past bearing by Piero's latest exploit, Ludovica rode back rather recklessly for one with her short sight towards Rome. Her brother Cesare had often warned her against thus "leaving the horse to do all your thinking for you," and she had had several falls through this incorrigible habit. This time, however, it was no swerve or stumble of the horse that gave her a shock after she had ridden two or three miles from the trysting-place. It was the terrifying, utterly unexpected apparition of her father, taking feature with bristling moustaches and stabbing little black eyes out of the dim figure of a horseman spurring furiously at her over a rise. Characteristically, however, she neither checked nor sought in panic to turn aside, but rode straight forward to meet him.

"Good morning, father," she said. "Were you seeking me?"

He was taken aback by her coolness. "Perhaps!" he answered with savage irony. "Or it may be I came out to hunt the fox on the campagna—alone."

"How did you know I should be here?" she asked in a calm voice, putting her horse to a walk in the direction of the city, so that he was compelled to turn too and ride at the same quiet pace by her side.

"I read the note," he said sternly, "which that *Frate* had the insolence to address to you. Lest he or you should prevaricate, I determined to be before you at the meeting-place. I was delayed by agents of the Governor, again cross-examining me! Else I would have taken you in the act!"

"What act, father?" His eyes fell before hers; he stammered wrathfully, chewing his moustaches, but did not make his thought explicit.

"It was no doubt," she continued, "a mystery and a shock to you to read such a message . . . but you did not . . . no, you cannot have suspected me of any shame. Have I ever given grounds for such a suspicion? Has my conduct ever been light?"

"How could you honourably be carrying on a correspondence with a *Frate*?"

"Why did you not ask me? I wished to spare you trouble concerning Piero; but if you had asked me I would not have told you a lie."

He stuttered, realising that he had acted stupidly under the influence of his anger. He had believed with his suspicious nature that he could detect his daughter in an intrigue. Yet he now saw that he might have known all if he had questioned her straightforwardly. He caught, however, at her allusion to Piero, to justify his rage. "There it is!" he exclaimed, "Piero! *Sangue di Cristo!* there is not one of my children I can trust, except that worthy fool Cesare! And if a son of mine is placarded as an assassin on all the walls of Rome, why should not a daughter of mine—"

"Because you know, my father, it is impossible. Because you know you are being ridden by your passion and not riding it. I came here to meet Piero and the friar, Brother Deodato, secretly, in order that we might arrange for Piero's escape."

"Piero was with you?" Her father's eyes pierced her like black flames.

She drew rein a moment and raised her hand in the air. "I

swear that what I have told you is true by the Holy Cross of the Castle ! ”

She signed herself as she said this, and her father with a swift, shame-faced gesture uncovered his head. Not all the gibes of all the rationalists had really undermined Adalberto's faith in the minute splinter of the True Cross of Christ that was preserved in an ancient gold reliquary (once worn round the neck by a crusading ancestor) upon the altar of the chapel in his mountain fastness. Thence his family drew their name, Counts of the Castle of the Holy Cross, and to cast open doubt on the authenticity of their famous relic was like picking holes in their title or descent. At least he could be sure his pious daughter would not take such an attestation blasphemously. He felt an immense load lifted off his breast. “Where is my unhappy son, then ? ” he enquired.

“Making his way towards the Tuscan frontier, in the frock and with the pass of the friar.”

“Ha ! then the *Frate* is one of those rascally conspirators, too ? I was told Mazzini had his accomplices in every walk of life, in the sacristy and in the convents as well as in the clubs and the huts. And is this friar, too, one of the rogues ? ”

“Brother Deodato is no politician, father.”

“Why did he mix himself in Piero's affairs, then ? ”

“Out of a kind heart, simply. He hid him in his church.”

“He will have to answer to his superiors for it ! ”

“He has fled from his convent for good. He has exchanged clothes with Piero.”

“A deserter, eh ? I thought there would be some motive for his kindness ! A runaway friar is the scum of the world—and fit to be the accomplice of my son ! ”

“Father, try to judge Piero less harshly ! Believe that he is a patriot by his own lights ! ”

“In what way could he serve Italy by murdering the French Emperor ? Napoleon is the only ruler in Europe who may help us to our unity some day.”

“Orsini believed that he had betrayed us. They say Napoleon was a Carbonaro in his youth in Italy, and that he has been false to his oath, sending his soldiers to Rome to hold us down in our divisions. So Orsini struck. . . . I do not approve him—God forbid ! But what are we to do now for Piero ? ”

“I will do nothing for him. Let him slink back to England, if

he can. They like to shelter the mad dogs of Europe there ! I paid him a pension to stay in England and keep quiet. He broke his engagement to me when he went into France, and he shall have nothing more. He is from this day dead to me. It is my last word, on the honour of Santa Croce ! ”

While they thus argued, they had drawn near once more to Porta San Paolo. At a cross-road in sight of the great extra-urban basilica they found themselves checked by a procession of men in black robes, with hoods drawn over their faces, who wheeled into the main way to the city intoning a melancholy chant. These were Misericordia Brothers, charitably conducting a funeral from some poor house on the campagna. A cross-bearer and a priest in a ragged cotta accompanied the sombre cortège, which was ended by the wheeled bier, pushed by hand, on which lay the corpse with uncovered face. It was that of a young labourer, whose face bore a slight likeness, by the wedge of its black beard, to Piero's. The Count and his daughter exchanged furtive glances, each seeking to read whether the other had noted the resemblance. Each face told the other its tale, and Ludovica crossed herself while her father lifted his hat.

In silence they let the poor man's funeral file past and precede them with its drawling dirge towards the Gate. Then at a little distance they followed, their horses seeming to pace funereally in sympathy with their thoughts. A tear glittered suddenly on the lashes of the old man, and fell upon his withered cheek.

A SOLDIER OF THE EMPIRE

(I)

THE Misericordia Brothers, soon after they had passed within the wall, turned off at a by-street, and the Count and his daughter quickened their pace to a trot. It was well on in the afternoon by now, and "I am hungry," announced the Count. It was his first utterance since seeing the funeral with its ominous suggestion, and it had a deliberate brusqueness as though he wished to close the short chapter of sentiment in which he had indulged.

It was written, however, that the old noble was not to reach his deferred *colazione* without still another encounter. The two riders were passing under the shoulder of the lonely, tree-crowned Aventine when other hoof-beats mingled with theirs, and two French officers came into view. The foremost of these saluted the Count at once as an old acquaintance. It was General Sertigues de Messimy, a General of Brigade in the French garrison at Rome, a small, plump, trim old man, sixty years of age, with an expansive affability. He at once manœuvred his horse sidelong across the road to greet the two Italians and detain them.

"*Bonjour, M. le Comte ; bonjour, Contessina,*" he piped up, displaying a ragged row of teeth between his waxed grey moustache and imperial. "I am very happy to meet you in this way. Give me leave to present to you a friend of mine," he leered deferentially over his shoulder at his companion, "whose acquaintance, I know, will give you pleasure. M. le Comte Santacroce del Castello . . . M. le Duc de Smolensk."

While General Sertigues went on to present his friend to the Contessina, Adalberto looked sharply at the stranger. To his natural suspiciousness there was added at this moment an apprehension that everyone he met was sneering at him or pitying him because of the scandal of Piero. Ludovica at the same moment

was eyeing the Duke with an electric sense of contact with a personality.

Smolensk was the antithesis of General Sertigues de Messimy, who was rotund, undignified, loquacious and thoroughly plebeian both in countenance and manner. (His persistent claim to the title of "Marquis" was one that the legists were still unwilling to recognise.) The Duke, on the other hand, was silent, rigid and as lean as if he had been undergoing siege starvation. His high cheek-bones showed through an almost transparent covering of flesh; the ears went to a point; the nose was a gaunt line pinched at the nostrils, and two faintly sardonic wrinkles went from it to the corners of the thin-lipped mouth, veiled by the regulation moustaches and beard of the fashion. These adornments were of an indeterminate sandy hue, as though their owner were aware of their being mere decoration and disdained to spend any of his vitality upon them. Even his seat on horseback contrasted with the little General's; for while the latter rolled about in his saddle and thrust out his spurred feet under their gold-striped red trousers, Smolensk seemed welded into his charger, sitting erect in the green undress tunic and *képi* of the Guides of the Imperial Guard—a uniform which the Count had at once recognised with respect.

It was a curious thing that this repressed figure seemed to vibrate with energy; in its stillness there was something crouched and coiled. Even in the way the straight eyelids drooped over the eyes there was a purposeful air, as if they were shields placed over some formidable ray to spare the onlooker—so long as war was not declared. Ludovica found herself wondering what colour those eyes might be that she could feel stealthily regarding her behind their shields.

"*M. le Duc*," old General Sertigues piped on, "is *italianissimo*, I assure you, Count. It is extremely fortunate that he should, thus early on his arrival in Rome, have made the acquaintance of a distinguished patriot like yourself!"

Suddenly the Duke opened his eyes—"Yellowish!" exclaimed Ludovica to herself—and displayed interest. "This is the Count Santacroce del Castello of Turin?" he enquired in a voice that had the sharp ring but also the polish of steel. "I ask your pardon, Monsieur, for not recognising who you were at once! I am the bearer of a letter of introduction to you from M. le Comte Cavour who desires we should become better acquainted."

Adalberto unbent at his leader's name. "I shall be delighted, *M. le Duc*. Any friend of my friend Count Cavour——"

"I will ask leave to call and pay my respects in due form. Will you perhaps be at home this evening?"

The promptness of this struck Ludovica as a trifle amusing. Evidently a military man *sans-façon*; yet the hard polish of his manner robbed the importunity of any shade of rudeness. Adalberto was secretly delighted that this important Frenchman should offer to visit his apartments just at the moment when the Roman nobility were likely to prove shy. He invited Smolensk with cordiality on behalf of himself and his wife.

The Duke smiled and nodded, a little in the style of a soldier who has carried a position—or a tiger, fancied Ludovica, noting again the yellowish light in his eyes, that has gained a piece of meat—a small piece, but he was resolved to have it!

There was more saluting and uncovering as the four equestrians prepared to separate. But after riding on a few paces with his companion, General Sertigues came trotting back. "This is sad news, *M. le Comte*," he murmured, "about your son!"

The Count stiffened. "It is a shameless falsehood put about by his enemies. Piero will appear in due course and answer his traducers!"

"*Sans doute! Sans doute!*" murmured the courtly little General. "There is so much political passion and mis-representation in Italy."

"My son," persisted Adalberto stubbornly, "is a patriot; he is not an assassin. If he was present at the moment of that shocking outrage against your Emperor, he was among the victims only."

"*Je le plains beaucoup!*" answered General Sertigues still more silkily. "Perhaps the young man has been indiscreet. Hurling words of flame and fire, as young men will! It is not my friend Smolensk who will reproach him for that! He is an ardent partisan of Italian liberty, and ready to make a meal of priests every Friday."

The General had been slyly watching while he spoke the changing play of expression on the Contessina's face. How it had kindled when he spoke of the Duke's love of Italy, and fallen when he described him as *mangeur de prêtres*. Now he leaned out of his saddle and whispered confidentially to the Count. "Pardon the liberty of an old friend. I understand *M. le Comte Cavour* has sent the Duke to visit you for a purpose. Allow me to say that no attention you can pay him will be misplaced. If you do not know it, he is one of the most

rising men at the Tuileries. The Empress dotes on him, in spite of his anti-clericalism. The Emperor, who lately gave him the temporary command of the Guides when their Colonel was ill, trusts him more and more. He is here on a confidential tour of inspection. If you gain a friend in him, you gain a friend always near the throne. You follow me?"

Count Adalberto's eyes had gleamed as he listened. Then their habitual look of suspicion had crept back, and he had shot one or two questioning glances at the busy little courtier General, while he pulled at his moustaches. At the end, he said. "I thank you, I thank you with all my heart, General. If *M. le Duc* does me the honour to call this evening . . . we can doubtless get to know one another better."

(2)

The Duke did not fail of his engagement. Like a tall shadow he seemed to Ludovica that evening as he crossed the threshold of their salon in the Palazzo Benucci by the rays of the oil-lamps which feebly illuminated the gaunt, frescoed walls and the painted cross-beams of the ceiling. He was the only caller, for Roman society, as was to be expected, was holding aloof from a family under such a cloud as theirs, and this cut, added to the annoyances he was being subjected to by the pontifical police, stirred Adalberto to a decision.

"I am very glad," was one of the first things he told his visitor, "that you were able to come here to-night, *M. le Duc*, as I have determined upon leaving Rome without delay—to-morrow if my family can be ready. I came here on business. The business is concluded and I go."

There was a protesting murmur from his wife as she resumed her seat by the fireplace, in which a couple of logs smouldered parsimoniously against the evening chill, and a fainter one from Ludovica, who had wrapped a black lace veil round her shoulders against the draughts of the *palazzo*.

Smolensk nodded gravely. "I appreciate your motives, *M. le Comte*," he answered, "and I regret the defamation of a member of your family by the Papal Government. For my own part, I admire . . . not the deed of Orsini, but his courage. So," he

added, enjoying the stupefaction of his listeners, "do the Emperor and Empress."

All three hearers made an incredulous sound.

"Oh! believe me, it is so"; the Duke nodded again. "The Emperor Napoleon, at least, knows that it is the man's head not his heart which was to blame. No one knows better than His Majesty the meaning of Italian patriotism. As for the Empress," he gave a frosty smile as he tugged his moustache out to a point like a dagger, a recurrent gesture of his, "well she is a Spaniard and *romanesque* . . . with all the revulsions of such a nature. She will shed tears the morning Orsini is guillotined."

"Impossible!" ejaculated Adalberto.

"*Signor Gesù!*" sighed the Countess.

"It is true, Madame, I assure you," asseverated Smolensk. "Shall we put it that her piety moves her to the evangelical precept of forgiving her enemies?"

"How noble!" It was the deep voice of Ludovica, ringing suddenly through the shadow and the firelight that played on the faded frescoes.

Smolensk turned his head sharply and regarded her. His long legs in their red pantaloons were stretched out before him, his tiny gilt spurs scraping the hearth-rug. His fingers had their carefully manicured tips pressed together; the sandy tinge of his beard and of the hair that was beginning to thin at the top of his domed skull shone in the dance of the log-fire. He dropped his hands now on the lion-heads of his fauteuil.

"Mademoiselle is also *romanesque!*" he hinted with a smile that cut in spite of its deference. "I prefer to forgive my enemies, if I must, when they can no longer do me harm."

Adalberto growled assent; but the Duke still sat observing Ludovica as if he were seeing her for the first time. She was leaning forward, with the black veil slipping off her head and disclosing, as though by the stroke of some fairy miner's pick, the shimmer of her hair. She had spoken in her eagerness without thought of the impression she might be making, and Smolensk's riposte, though delivered with a buttoned foil, had thrown her into disarray—her small mouth open and quivering, her cheeks stained with colour, her eyes misted. She had carried her hand across her breast and was plucking the fringed top of her bodice.

The old Count was off and away now on his favourite topics—

the iniquity of Mazzinianism and Revolution, the blind folly of the re-actionary Powers which could not read the signs of the times, the urgent need for friends of ordered liberty to co-operate in building a new, united Italy on the basis of the Piedmontese monarchy and parliamentary institutions. The Duke appeared to listen to him absorbed. There was an admirable deference about the slightly inclined poise of his bald-crowned head—a poise he had brought to perfection at so many councils of war, so many Imperial conferences, so many dinner-parties and soirées in the Champs-Élysées, and even in the Faubourg St. Germain. For it was the case that the old legitimist aristocracy themselves accepted for the sake of his polish and personality the son of that Pierre-Paul Richard, born a wheelwright, who had risen from Corporal to Marshal in the *Grande Armée* of Napoleon I, and had received the decorative Dukedom of Smolensk on the ghastly Russian battlefield of that name. Pierre-Clément Richard, the second Duke, had shown himself a stout soldier too. In the Crimean war he had been one of the first Frenchmen to tumble into the Malakoff with MacMahon, to whose staff he had been posted; and Napoleon III, always delighted when he could conjure up the shades of the First Empire to adorn the ceremonies of the Second, had brought Smolensk to Court, made him for a short while *Premier Veneur* of the Imperial Hunt, and then given him rank as second-in-command of the crack cavalry regiment of the Empire, the Guides of the Guard. All this had given Pierre-Clément Richard practice enough in courtly diplomacy, and Count Adalberto did not dream that the Duke was giving less than full attention to his political tirade. The old *Contessa*, however, from her seat by the fireside, knew better. She knew that all the time Smolensk was watching her daughter; that the eyes behind the lowered lids were not dead as they appeared to be, but full of slumbering fire.

To himself Smolensk was saying: "Passion! What passion that girl is capable of! . . . And what else is there in the world that counts?" His reverie of a wearied amorist floated away upon the quest that already at the age of forty-five was baffling him . . . the quest for a woman who should rejuvenate him, put an edge on his sated senses, carry him out of himself . . . yes, even if she were to demand that he, too, should turn *romanesque*, were to make an idiot of him! But did that woman exist? He had tried them all, he thought, sophisticated Duchesses and the Carpatho-Croatian Ambassadors at Paris for her barbarism, *dévôtes*,

tragic actresses—*Quelle blague, cela!*—comically vital and vulgar bourgeoises, *midinettes*, country girls in sabots with their animal freshness and diverting awkwardness . . . but he had never yet found his salvation. . . . And here he was dreaming it might lie in the bosom of this daughter of the petty Italian *noblesse*, brought up at her mother's apron-strings and under her father's cane, schooled, beyond doubt, in all the straitness, the piety, the uneducated self-esteem, the parsimonious misery of her caste! "*Ah! mon Dieu! quelle blague encore!* What clap-trap!" And without breaking off his meditation, he heard his own voice saying, "My dear sir, you are perfectly right," to the Count.

He had scarcely heard the proposition to which he had so cordially assented, but he was almost startled out of his languid posture to see the effect of his words upon the girl. She had started forward; her mouth had opened again, but this time in excitement; her great brown eyes were wide and shining. He had evidently struck a lucky blow. *Nom d'un chien!* to what, then, had he assented?

He peeled the indifference from his ears, and listened to the Count's rasping voice saying, "You agree, then, *M. le Duc*, that it is the historic mission of the French Empire to execute the testament of Napoleon I, and aid Italy to recover her nationhood?"

Was that all? *Parbleu!* Why should he not assent? It would mean war, but he was ready to welcome war. There was no real advancement in peace for fellows like him. He would never succeed as a politician; he spoke his mind too sarcastically. No: the steps of his progress would be marked by campaigns, and he would as soon fight to turn the Austrians and the priests out of their places of power in Italy as for any other cause. His family was anticlerical by tradition; Pierre-Paul Richard, the future Marshal, had aided Carrière to effect his drownings of priests and nuns at Nantes, before he became a soldier. Avowed anticlericalism was not the style at the Tuileries, with a fervently Catholic Spanish Empress; but the Emperor's cousin, Prince Jérôme Napoleon, professed it, and there was a strong party at Court in favour of the Italian cause. If to profess his own sympathy with it meant bringing such a fire of approbation into the face of the passionate young beauty opposite, for beauty he was beginning to judge her as his Parisian ideas of elegance fell into the background, then let him repeat it, with all his heart! Lifting his half-closed lids, and letting his yellowish eyes gleam out in a laughter that seemed frank and comradely,

though it had a note of savagery in it, he declared "I personally am ready to fight to the last drop of my blood for your great country, Mademoiselle, and for a glance from the bright eyes of the ladies of Italy!"

He paused, enjoying her embarrassment; but the Count did not notice it. "Then, *M. le Duc*," he insisted, "will you not use your influence with your Emperor to turn his thoughts to the glory he would gain from such an enterprise? May we not admit you into the circle of those who are pledged to work for the resurrection of Italy?"

Smolensk fell back in his armchair, while an enigmatical smile showed beneath his sandy moustache. He smelt a rat . . . he had rather expected it. This was why Count Cavour had been so urgent, when he was in Turin on his way south, that he should meet these people in Rome. Cavour was always working to one end; sleeping, he dreamed of nothing but Italy, and how to use men for her benefit. That was quite in order for him, *c'était son métier*; but why should Pierre-Clément Richard be made to row in that galley? People erred who thought they could make a tool of Pierre-Clément Richard. If there were any interest to be served that of Pierre-Clément came first. He could decide for himself whether any other were worth pursuing. Who were this family of impoverished aristocrats, sitting in their shabby hired salon amid the ruins of their country's greatness, who were they to try and make a puppet of a Duke of the French Empire, an officer of the Guard, a nobleman rich with the investments his father had made during the reign of Louis Philippe out of the plunder accumulated in the conquests of Napoleon I? Did these provincials—for that was what they really were, provincials,—did they believe they could dispose of him? *Quel toupet!* Why should he play their game?

To bring back the pale transparent glow to the cheeks of that daughter of theirs, sitting with such a regal mien in her stiff First Empire chair of black wood with inlaid bronze blades, her fingers lightly clasped upon her lap, her long, slim foot just emerging from her skirt upon her footstool? Junonian in pose and dignity, reflected the Duke, but Juno was becoming a bore. People tittered behind the back of Juno every day, and deceived her every night. Nobody revered Olympus any longer—at Paris.

And suddenly it was his pleasure to be brutal. "Italy will have to wait," he said; "no man can tell how long she may have to wait.

Is the Emperor to be asked to risk his throne, to alienate his Catholic subjects . . . to annoy his wife . . . without any recompense but the *beaux yeux* of Italian patriots? Pray pardon my frankness, *M. le Comte*. But the question is, what can Italy give France in return?"

Ah! she was not a statue, after all! The tears that were dimming the great eyes, the melancholy that was drawing down the corners of her lips showed she was not marble, but a harp that any practised touch could play upon, could rouse to grief, to joy, to anger . . . and surely, if one wanted, to passion!

Abruptly he stood up to take his leave. He was not going to be noosed in this way, either! He was accustomed to reflect over everything that allowed time for reflection; to dare (and dare greatly) only when there was no time for coolly weighing the chances. Was he being captivated by this girl? If so, better snap the fragile spell at once . . . before, perchance, it should grow too strong to be broken. He would assume no fetters of which the key was not in his own keeping.

Yet perhaps he was already not quite master of his own destiny, since before he left the salon he had made arrangements to meet the family of Santacroce del Castello again. An invitation to make an expedition upon the campagna—the men riding, the ladies driving—had been given and accepted, the Count proclaiming that he had after all changed his mind about leaving Rome to-morrow.

(3)

It was the memory of that expedition, and of the luncheon they had taken with them to eat in the garden of a tiny *osteria* where the wine was known to be good, that haunted Ludovica on a Sunday some weeks later while she knelt at Mass in the Basilica of Santa Croce in Gerusalemme. This church attracted her in spite of its rustic remoteness, just inside the city walls, but far across vines and gardens from the shrunken limits of present-day Rome, because here centred the legend of the Invention of the True Cross by the Empress Helena in Jerusalem of which her own family tradition was but a splintered twig. But to-day she was not thinking of how the Holy Cross was brought from Palestine to be enshrined in this austere and solitary basilica, enlivened only by the frescoes of

the legend over the apse. Her mind, stirred by the news that the Duke of Smolensk had returned to Rome after a tour round some of the chief towns of the Papal States, was seeing again the garden of the *osteria* on the campagna, with its wooden trellis covered by spring greenery, and the lean fowls picking about for crumbs in the gravel under their feet, and the cat with the famished eyes peering at them from the top of the arbour. She saw the sun striking through the leaves and turning them to a tenderer green where it struck, and the gold of the Albano wine in its bottle, and the pale-blue smoke of the cigars permitted by the ladies to the two gentlemen wreathing itself round Smolensk's baldish dome as he sat and talked.

Smoke that had soon in her fancy thickened to battle-clouds ; for, prompted by the Count, who had served against the Austrians at Novara in 1849, and would have welcomed another such fight even if it meant another such defeat, the Duke had told of his experiences in the Crimea—the blue and scarlet lines of the Allies climbing the slopes at the Alma, the storm and night and frost of the winter before Sebastopol. Then, just as she was beginning to shiver in spite of the afternoon sun pouring into the little arbour, he had moved the scene to Algeria, with its parching heat and sand, its galloping, running fights with the brown-skinned tribesmen.

All the time he talked he was watching through those lowered lids of his the effect of his stories upon her ; in a pause to light a fresh cigar he reflected that the phases of each battle or adventure could be read in her face. She, for her part, was unaware of this scrutiny ; but felt he was the most interesting man she had ever met. When he stopped at length, with a smiling apology, and the familiar voices of her father and mother made themselves heard again, the world seemed to have turned dull. Even the daylight, she thought, had dimmed in consequence—for she read her own feeling into the veiling and sinking of the late afternoon sun.

They had lingered longer than they had intended, gossiping over old wars at the *osteria* ; and though they made brisk speed back to the city the dusk began to race them, at which the Countess demanded the closing of the carriage windows, and drew her scarf over her mouth for fear of the rising of the malaria.

Ludovica sat beside her mother, watching while the green swells of the campagna faded into grey ; its pillars and lumps of ruins into spectres and crouching monsters. The Duke seemed of set

purpose to ride on her side of the carriage, though he kept his eyes upon the road ahead. As the swift Italian night came striding on, draining the colours from all surrounding objects, his profile changed to a dark silhouette, a razor-edged silhouette made by his thin nose and sharply receding forehead. The driver quickened the pace of the horses as the dusk thickened, and the Duke trotted and cantered more swiftly beside the carriage-wheel to keep level. Now, all around, the campagna had dissolved in shadow; by some peculiar play of the failing light it seemed to be heaving like a slow and silent sea. Ludovica felt as if she were adrift rudderless on this mysterious ocean; it seemed to be mounting to submerge the towers of Rome.

Her mind flew to her brother Piero. What had befallen him and where was he lurking? She had as yet heard nothing from him; but it was at any rate good news that she had heard nothing of him; his arrest anywhere in Italy would have been published with gratification in the Roman papers. The hopes of his family rested on a plot of Benedetta's, who had found some pieces of his clothing, neglected by the police, in the inn where he had stayed a night on reaching Rome, and trusted by persuading an enamoured Tiber boatman to fish them up, to establish that Piero had been drowned escaping. But at the best, Ludovica thought dolefully, Piero was away from her in illness, difficulty and danger. Nor could she think of her brother without recalling that other boy, the strange creature who had, as it were, changed before her eyes from friar to adventurer, so devoted without cause, so gay and elusive in the midst of his trials. Where was that little friend now, toiling over what mountains, crossing what inhospitable seas, buried in the turmoil of what outlandish city? Everything in her life had seemed at this moment to take on the character of the restless sea of shadow that surrounded the carriage, to be on the move, slowly, resistlessly, neither to be stayed nor hastened in its sweep, bearing her onwards she could not dream whither.

The carriage stopped for the footman to climb down and light the lamps. In the ray of the one on her side Smolensk appeared immobile like a sentry on his horse. His presence gave her an unexpected sense of reassurance. He was so steely, so cool and capable. Nothing much could go wrong with you if you had such a man on your side; and before she knew what she was doing she had drifted into a dream of what life with him would be like. It

would be purged of ennui, that was certain. It would be a thing of continual enterprise, adventure and ambition . . . Not the idle adventures and excitements that had filled the days of the only man with whom she had so far in her life had an *amourette*, a young cavalry officer in Turin whose laughing eyes and svelte presence in his pale-blue uniform had given her at the moment of her blossoming into womanhood a three months' infatuation she had always afterwards blushed at. That lad's idea of adventure had been a steeplechase, a higher bid than he could afford at cards, or a duel that the seconds would take good care should not end fatally. Smolensk would have no patience with that kind of trifling. If he duelled it would be to kill; if he staked life or fortune it would be for big prizes—and, she believed, not meanly egotistic ones.

Yes, surely this Frenchman, she had often thought since that drive, would be capable of devotion to a great cause—the devotion of a practical man of the world rather than of the dreamer or the fanatic—but not to be despised for that! Cavour, her childhood's mentor, she knew, hated the impractical, the windy, the nebulous. He dealt with men as they were, with infinite humour and tolerance, not expecting to have saints or demigods for his instruments, candidly grateful for any scrap of idealism he could extract from them. She tried often to see Smolensk through the Italian statesman's eyes. What a force Cavour would judge him! Could his energies be guided into a fruitful channel, what immense things he might effect! He might in truth become the paladin of Italy—if only the incentive could be supplied. She was grateful for Cavour's forethought in introducing the Duke to them. It was a privilege and an encouragement to meet such a man. But how could they influence him in the right direction?

Again and again she wished desperately that she had eloquence, intellect, personal magnetism. But she was no Mme. de Staël, no Princess Belgiojoso—Muses to guide and take possession of men's spirits. She was only—Smolensk had subtly made her feel it in the one or two more meetings they had had—a provincial girl with a big heart and a good will, and not enough knowledge of courts or camps or cabinets or Bourses to be the least use at all in practical affairs. . . . Surely Cavour had been mocking her that day nine years ago, when she was only fifteen, and was strolling with him on the terrace at Castello della Santa Croce, while boastful political discussion still came through the open windows of the dining-room.

"Nevertheless," he had said as if in answer to the disputers within, "it is very likely you, Ludovica, who will do the greatest work for Italy. . . ."

Ting . . . ting . . . ting! It was the bell sounding for the Elevation, and Ludovica bowed herself till her forehead almost touched the stone floor, while she strained to receive into her soul more of the Divine light and power that she might be able to play her part in the mighty events impending over the world, fateful for her country. Smolensk's conversation had rooted that conviction in her. It might be to-morrow, or it might, as he sometimes seemed to think, be delayed years . . . changes, upheavals, new political and social births were certainly on their way. How could she play her part for Italy? Again she laboured to surrender herself to the Divine guidance. . . .

When she descended from this spiritual exaltation the Mass was over and the Basilica nearly empty. She rose from her stiffened knees to seek Benedetta, who had been making her own devotions in the crypt. She had hardly gone a few paces when she stopped with a shock. Underneath one of the great whitewashed piers of the nave, Smolensk was standing and evidently waiting for her.

She could not avoid him without discourtesy, and therefore walked slowly toward him while he came to meet her, his sabre clanking over the pavement of the church. "You are surprised to see me here, Mademoiselle?" he enquired after saluting her. His thin lips twitched in an almost roguish smile. "The Richards were never church-going folk—unless it were to rob the churches. *Ah! excusez moi!*" he bowed as he saw her cheek flush. "I respect your convictions, Mademoiselle, but it is better for me to speak the truth to you than to try to deceive you, is it not?" He paused so imperiously on this question, tugging his moustache out to its dagger-point, that Ludovica could only murmur, "No doubt, *M. le Duc.*"

"I am glad to hear you say so, Mademoiselle," he continued, as they strolled side by side round the church. "Myself, I love frankness above all things. I must tell you that except for attending the Emperor's Mass at the camp of Châlons, I do not think I have heard one for over twenty years. What has brought me here to-day, then, you may well ask? Mademoiselle, it is yourself."

She raised her eyes to his with a steadily enquiring look, and he continued without a trace of embarrassment. "I hoped that you

would explain your religion to me. Frankly, again, I have never wanted to understand it before ; I seldom respected the professors of your creed. They make brave soldiers, but with minds as narrow as needles' eyes. The Empress has Catholicism in her blood—but could she defend it intellectually for a quarter of an hour ? ” He smiled. “ But you,” he changed his tone, and his eyes suddenly opened on her like a cat's at night, amber, lustrous, and dominating, “ you are quite different. It would be worth a man's while to read your soul, Mademoiselle. . . . Tell me, for instance,” he went on, seeing her hesitate, “ how can a Catholic be a patriot ? Are you not always under two loyalties ? ”

“ We Italians ? No ! ” she laughed scornfully. “ Take our faith from us and what is left ? Take the Church from Italy, and you take her literature, her arts, her buildings, all her culture.”

He stroked his moustache, glad to have stirred her into vehemence. “ Of the Italians that may be true,” he said ruminatively, “ but we others ? France for example.”

“ You have nothing, nothing whatever, but what you have drawn from us ! You are Latins, children of Italy in all that raised you above the Gaulish barbarians whom our Giulio Cesare raised from brutishness. Why it is only fifty years, *M. le Duc*, since you were saved again from anarchy by another Italian, Buonaparte, whose nephew now sits upon your throne ! ”

“ *Touché !* ” The soldier of the Empire laughed at the hit.

“ As for the other nations,” pursued Ludovica, enriching with her fervour the lessons learned from the Abate Gioberti, “ if there are traces of culture in Germany, they come from the Holy Roman Empire, do they not ? If there is civilisation in Russia, it is owed to us through the New Rome on the Bosphorus. England was born again in our Renaissance—— ”

He raised his hands. “ Mercy ! Mercy ! The bombardment of your learning, Mademoiselle, silences my poor batteries ! Why, you are inspired . . . a poetess ! Yes, and a patriot *comme il nous en faut !* But yet, forgive me, I do not clearly see what share the excellent *Papa Pio* has in these glories of Italy's and Europe's past. Can you explain that to me ? ”

She hesitated, “ In words, no. But I could show you, if you would permit.”

“ Lead me where you will ! ” He picked up his sabre under his arm.

"Not now!" She smiled at his military promptness. "Can you wait a fortnight?"

"A fortnight, yes. A month, no. I must be back in Paris by then."

"Then on Easter Day I invite you to hear the Pope's High Mass in St. Peter's."

"What should I learn there?" Wariness had crept into his voice again.

"I would persuade you," she answered in a low, tremulous tone, looking away from him to the paintings on the apse, "that there is glory and an immortal name in history waiting for the man who will raise Italy from her living tomb."

"No other reward?" he asked her point-blank, leaning over towards her, with one hand on the balustrading of the Confession round the High Altar, at which they had arrived.

He saw her stiffen, and the ferrule of the parasol she carried press against the floor. For an instant she closed her eyes. "She has gone back to marble," he told himself, watching her with the alertness of the hunter. "But it is not indifference. Come now! Have I struck? Is it the *hallali*?"

Ludovica's soul was thrown into utter turmoil. That abrupt spring of his upon her womanhood had ripped the veil of delusions she had been weaving for the past weeks. She had let her imagination be dominated by this man, had surrendered to the vivid energy of his personality . . . only to realise, at the moment of his declaration, that she did not love him at all. He had not even the physical appeal to her that had been made by the foolish young cavalryman years ago. Much less could he stir in her anything like the passionate platonic love she now knew she had during his lifetime felt for her confessor, Canon Visconti, that nervous, temperamental priest, stricken with pulmonary disease, who had awakened her intelligence to the works of the liberal Catholic philosophers and her soul to the splendours of her country. No, at the moment when Smolensk had ripped, as it were, his naked soul out of its scabbard, with a predacious gleam of those tigerish eyes, she had felt only a throb of fear. . . .

Fear! But had she the right to save herself by flight? How often she had dreamed of giving herself to Italy—girlish dreams of riding, Amazonian, in the patriot ranks, like Virgil's Camilla or Garibaldi's Anita, maturer visions of inspiring statesmen by the

force of persuasion and intelligence. . . . And now in a blind instant, without preparing her, Italy called for a sacrifice which she had not expected . . . In a bitter, dreary moment she realised that not her soul or her intelligence were what she was called upon to give, but . . . her body. And was it this that Cavour had foreseen when prophesying that she would one day do great work for her country? And was it for this that he had sent Smolensk to their doors in Rome. . . . If it was, Cavour must be right; the sacrifice must be required of her.

Smolensk, as he heard the heart-rending sigh that burst from her, touched his moustache in perplexity. What the devil! He had been prepared for bewilderment, pride, anger . . . especially when she had turned so stone-like. But grief? What had he said to cause that?

She opened her eyes, but not to look at him. They fixed themselves again on the fresco of the Finding of the Cross. Then, facing Smolensk, she said abruptly. "I will answer that, too, on Easter Sunday. . . . Do not say more to me now, I cannot stand it! Do not follow me." She turned and swept, almost rushed, away, with an agitated whisper of her skirts upon the marble floor, toward the doors.

Surprised at this storm of emotion, the Duke stepped after her, not to disobey her by pursuing—he was too shrewd for that—but to keep her in view. He watched her figure diminish as she passed with incredible swiftness down the nave, till near the west doors she was joined by another female form, that of Benedetta, and the two passed out of sight together into the vestibule.

For a moment he stood still, with knotted brows, wondering what precisely to make of her reply. He wondered, too, what his own exact intentions were . . . asked himself coldly why he had rushed at the redoubt like that, when he had come into the church only on a scouting expedition. . . . She must be a sorceress, a sorceress of gold fire and maddening marble! Ruminating, he thrust his hand into his hip-pocket for his cigar-case . . . then he remembered where he was. No, decidedly, the Richards were not used to being in churches!

He sauntered out through the vestibule, setting his képi at a jaunty tilt upon his head, and mounted his horse, which he had given to a beggar to hold, in the deserted space in front of the church. A pontifical *carabiniere* on duty in the porch of the Basilica

clicked his heels and saluted as the French officer passed. Smolensk acknowledged the salute with a white-gloved forefinger and the most condescending air in the world.

"*Porco di Francese!*" snarled the Pope's man between his teeth, as the officer of the Guides rode away.

EASTER SUNDAY

(I)

THE sun fell in sheets from the dome upon the closely packed heads of the crowd that surged and swayed round the High Altar of St. Peter's. Between the male polls, fair and dark, cropped or long-locked, the bonnets of the women sprouted like many-coloured flowers; red, purple and blue, and the white kerchiefs of the Roman women and the *contadine* gleamed like patches of snow.

The Duke of Smolensk thought this crowd more like the audience of an Opera House than a religious congregation, so noisy and chattering was it, so restless and distracted. Indeed, he actually saw a few pairs of opera-glasses levelled among the lorgnettes. Theatrical, too, he judged the hangings of crimson damask veiling the vast piers of the dome, which, like the chandeliers of crystal, made the scene more like a court salon than a cathedral.

He was in a tribune, itself suggestive of a theatre, built to the left of the Confession, and furnished with wooden benches. Next to him Ludovica was placed; next to her the old Countess, industriously telling her beads; and, beyond, the Count, standing, with his hands patiently crossed before him and from time to time stroking his beard, as though he were on a military parade. "There," thought the Duke, "is another performing his fatigue like me—but without my hope of compensation." He glanced sidelong at Ludovica, whose eyes were set upon the altar beneath its canopy of twisted bronze pillars, each as tall as the roof of a church.

The Easter Mass was already well on its way, and the Gospel procession was being formed on the further side of the altar, which the occupants of the tribune could not see. They could perceive only the glow of the candles borne by the acolytes, occasionally the dark, tonsured heads of Masters of Ceremonies moving to and fro,

and from time to time the vermilion caps of the Cardinals when their wearers stood up in a row.

This happened now while the Cardinal Deacon carrying the Gospel book climbed through rising coils of incense to the papal throne, elevated high on steps above the throng. The Pope, crowned with his mitre, stood up to bless the Deacon who knelt before him; and Smolensk, who always went straight to the man beneath the crown or coronet or cocked hat—for that was the path by which to arrive—keenly studied Pius IX's heavy, lined face with its thatch of grey hair gleaming at the temples on the brown skin. It was the unmoving face of an idol, he thought, except for the vivacity of the little black eyes, which seemed, despite their concentration on the sacred task in hand, to take in out of their corners each detail of the scene and the assemblage. The thick lips seemed not unkindly, ready to smile. "A gossip!" diagnosed the Frenchman. "A benevolent despot, genial unless thwarted, and then peevishly autocratic. After all, why not?"

He looked round indulgently at the excited mob about him, which seemed to wake into fresh life every time the Pope thus clearly appeared in sight, the friars in their brown and black-and-white habits, the Trinitarians with their red-and-blue crosses, the priests and seminarists, all pressing forward and signing themselves, as though seeking to absorb some of the almost physical sanctity emanating from the Vicar of Christ. He watched the burly peasants dropping on their knees and thrusting their cross-gartered legs regardlessly in among the ankles of their neighbours; saw agitated women holding up rosaries and little articles of piety to bathe them in the mystic effluence from the throne; and marked how the country girls, beautifully unconscious of their surroundings, sighed, sobbed, beat their breasts, or cried aloud their joy in voices of a delicate roughness. "After all, why not?" he repeated. "They ask no more. They are children, accepting without question the rule of a hot-tempered, but indulgent, Father. No one will ever make soldiers of this people." And he glanced contemptuously at the corpulent citizen-soldiers of the Palatine militia, lining the nave with their ineffective muskets, at the dandified Noble Guards in their scarlet tunics and gold helmets, and at the carnivalesque, striped Swiss with their plumes and corselets. "It is all *décor*," he pronounced, "and this State hopes to survive in the modern world! *Quelle blague!*" Then he looked at Ludovica's rapt face, and

tugged at his moustaches, wondering. "Is this really love," he asked himself, "at last?"

He was surprised at the softness that was stealing over him. He was leaning forward to gain a closer view of Ludovica when a stir in the crowd distracted him. It bent like a corn-field swept by a breeze, and he saw Ludovica sink on her knees with it, not in the almost sycophantic self-abasement of the majority, but with a stately motion, her face still uplifted as though sustained in a religious trance. The Duke's forehead wrinkled; his teeth gnawed his sandy moustaches; he could not comprehend, but he was impressed, subdued. A dead stillness had come over the immense cathedral, an almost eerie hush. So tense was it that Smolensk nearly jumped when he heard the cry of orders and the rattle of arms as the Palatine Guard fell on the knee saluting, the crimson pompons on their shakoes burning like rosebuds down the middle of the nave.

For a moment the French soldier was amazed at this military welcome offered to the God of Peace. He looked almost stupidly at the pale glimmer of the Host up-held in the podgy fingers of the Pope behind the giant candlesticks. Then, penetrating his very bones, came the cry of silver trumpets, like distant news of victory. It woke the military romanticism that lay bashfully hid in his soul; and as the trumpets died away, to give place to an ethereal burst of voices from the sunlit gallery within the dome, he seemed in a flash to understand the place, the rite.

Triumph! His materialistic mind could only take in the idea piecemeal and shadowily. But he now discerned a unity in the harlequin brilliance of the Papal Guards, the scintillating vestments, the brilliant marbles, the ecstatic statues with their uptossed limbs. He plucked almost agitatedly at his moustache, invaded and shaken by the serene self-confidence of the spectacle. Ugliness, deformity, squalor—the imperial Church had no room for these, at least within the precincts of the sanctuary. Impatient of waiting, Rome had brought Heaven down to earth with the same iron hands that had in former ages wielded the invincible swords of the legionaries. Authoritatively she proclaimed her message—a humanity remade, exalted, charged with energy, fired by the vision of all-conquering beauty. It was, though Smolensk did not know as much, the cry of the master-souls of the Italian Renaissance, prolonged through the re-carved masks of ancient sanctity.

Smolensk knew only that he felt that pricking at the back of his eyes, that tendency to a misted vision which came over him sometimes while he watched the Imperial Army of France sweep past the Emperor at the saluting base on the review-ground; which had affected him even more strongly when he saw the Zouaves and the eagles pouring forward up the hillside at the Alma . . . a feeling he had ever repressed as weak and womanish. He was trying now to regain his chilly equilibrium of soul, when a thunder of acclamation broke forth that drowned the still pealing organs, the shrilling and clangour of the *castrati* and basses of the Sistine choir. Shaking his head to free his eyes from that tell-tale moisture, he saw the Pope advancing towards him on his chair above the crowd, the triple-rimmed tiara of sovereignty now replacing the mitre on his brow, clouds of incense enwreathing him, and at his back the sleek, shaven jowls of ecclesiastics repeated in endless vista like a play of interlocking mirrors. Up went the roaring, the rapture of devotion, hurling its waves against the gilt rosettes upon the ceiling of the nave, seeking to reach the shimmer of the inaccessible dome. There, however, it fell short, leaving high overhead a wide belt of tranquillity, into which the sun fell joyously from the blue sky outside the windows of the cupola, to play its own glancing games unmoved by human dreams and exultations; ignoring as it had been the swarming of an ant-hill the turmoil far below upon the little polished oblong of the floor.

The whole congregation was streaming out of the basilica now on the heels of the papal procession, seeking places on the piazza outside to receive the blessing *Urbi et Orbi* which the Holy Father would in a few minutes deliver from the balcony over the vestibule. The old *Contessa* had been among the first to battle her way out of the tribune towards the western doors, and her husband followed her with marital fidelity. Ludovica for a moment turned her white, transfigured face towards Smolensk in a mute invitation to him to follow, and he stepped briskly after her, the hunter's passion now surging uncontrollably in his breast, whipped up by the strong emotion of the last half-hour.

At the vestibule they found themselves herded by *carabinieri* right and left into the colonnades encircling the place of St. Peter's, for the whole front of the piazza was occupied by troops with fixed bayonets holding back the masses on the square. A wild rush followed; and soon Ludovica and the Duke were separated from

her parents, and he had more than once to put his arm round her to save her from being thrown down by the mob, as it raced through the colonnades to find better viewpoints. At length he shepherded her up against one of the pillars, planting himself before her to ward off the jostling crowd.

The bells were clanging madly overhead; the sky was an azure furnace behind the tumbled roofs of the Vatican opposite. Ludovica leant against the huge girth of the pillar, wan and exhausted, but still with that transported light on her face. Her bonnet had been crushed in the press, and dangled at her back; her hair was disordered, falling in shining tendrils round her cheeks. Now she collected her strength and bent forward towards Smolensk, fixing him with eyes that seemed to him like translucid brown lakes which sought to lure his soul into their depths. "Well?" she asked breathlessly, "Did you understand? Did the light come?"

He gave a short laugh, but there was a tremor in it, and his voice sounded sincere as he answered, "*Mon Dieu!* yes, I believe I have seen a light. Not that of faith—it would be too much to expect of the son of an old Jacobin. But I perceive the augustness of your Italian religion . . . a spiritual empire, *n'est-ce pas?* and yet fleshly too." He found his words with difficulty, frowning under the effort. "It is truly seducing," he concluded.

"Then"; she astonished him by laying her long fingers on his sleeve, "you will be the soldier of Italy?" It was said in a low voice that thrilled through him.

He drew in his breath, his thin nostrils quivered, and he answered, "My sword for Italy, if Italy will give me in return her golden rose! Ludovica, will you be my wife?"

He leaned forward to whisper these last words, fearful lest he should be overheard in the throng, and his face came so close to hers that for a second his moustaches brushed her cheek.

She quivered as if struck by a spear, closed her eyes, and let her arms fall in a gesture of surrender.

"I give myself," she answered, as though speaking less to him than the Unseen. Her words came clearly out in the abrupt silence that had fallen on the crowd all round them. For a moment there was no sound but the splash of the fountains in the square. Then,

overhead, a powerful, mellow voice sent out a jet of music over the still and kneeling multitude. It was the voice of the Pope upraised in blessing to the City and the World.

END OF BOOK ONE



BOOK II

Vagabondage

“ Oh ! 'tis of a rich merchant in London did dwell,
He had but one daughter, an uncommon nice gel ! ”

Victorian Ballad.

CHAPTER ONE

FUNERARY

(I)

A STORM of sleet covered the deck of the brig as she moved up the Thames in the livid March dawn, and drove the youth in his ill-made clothes, bought in Naples, to cower under the lee bulwarks for protection. But curiosity was stronger in Deodato than fear of wet or cold. So soon as the squall had whirled away over the Essex flats, and revealed again the leaden river, the leaden sky and the dull rows of little houses crouching almost below the water-line on the bank opposite, he was back at his post by the side, looking eagerly at a dark cloud above the windings of the river ahead, which he knew to be the smoke pall of London.

There was a pinched look about his face which made him more like the hollow-cheeked boy who had served the altar in the Church of S. Francesco a Ripa than the satyr-like creature who had capered across the sunny campagna on the day of his escape from Rome. But harsh as the fingers of experience had been in the weeks since he had left the convent, they had not marked him with the cowed look which the repressions of a misconceived vocation had stamped upon him. There was a firm, even defiant glance from the blue-grey eyes, not the glazed stare that mental anguish had set there; instead of the buried line of the lips, the lower one jutted, almost with obstinacy; and when a member of the crew passing along the deck hailed him cheerily in Italian, the smile that flashed back brought out the flower-like curve that had always been the beauty of the mouth.

Yet Deodato had lived grim days in Naples, and since. One of the first things he had done, as soon as his tonsure had become overgrown enough, and he had enough suspicion of whisker to make it safe for him to cross the border of the Kingdom in the character of the taciturn, but gold-giving, English gentleman, "Charles MacSweeney," was to sell Piero's clothes in which he had passed

the frontier guards. In the stead of these possibly compromising garments he had bought his present suit of slops, of a light cotton and cloth mixture cruelly inadequate against the storms of a spring voyage or the winds of an English March. He had hoped that the balance of the purchase money, without breaking into the one gold coin he had managed to hoard from Ludovica's little store, might suffice to buy him a passage in some small ship to England. He was soon disillusioned; and when his attempts to get taken on as a hand were laughed at, he had to draw on his slender resources again in order to buy some paints with which he made sketches of ships and quayside figures, hoping to sell them round the docks.

But the police threatened him, and the *lazzaroni*, furious against this infringer (as they judged) of their begging privilege, pushed a block of Carrara marble from a wharf on to the rocks below where he was painting. He just escaped being crushed; and forgetting to pursue his attackers stood looking longingly at the damaged marble, wishing he had the knowledge and the tools to make it his own. At nights he tried to sleep in a cheap lodging-house by the water, where, besides dirt and discomfort, he learned things about the relationship of the sexes that to him, convent-bred and initiated only into the transgressions of a romantic imagination, came as a disclosure of Nature that made him sicken and shudder. Into the underworld of Naples he might have sunk and disappeared, had he not one day in a small *osteria*, where he was taking one of his more and more rarely spaced meals, encountered the Captain of this ship, who was amused by a drawing he made of him, and, after hearing his plight, agreed to take him as help to the cook—"un Inglese," he explained—on his approaching voyage to England with a cargo of marble slabs, barrels of lemon-peel in brine, and olive oil.

The passage in a small sailing ship, through the raving spring gales, had been a purgatory and a prolonged one; but at last they had beaten up the Channel, rounded the North Foreland, and on this bitter dawn were at last coming slowly up the Thames through the gusts of sleet and rain.

Already they had entered Gallions Reach. The riverside outskirts of the city were drawing round them, warehouses of bleak brick and sordid streets running down to the black, uneasy water's edge. Upon Deodato's spirits, as he clenched the rail, and gazed

across the river with its wavelets slightly crested with cold foam, the absence of colour fell with a crushing depression. He had known melancholy skies in his own land, but never anything like this hard grey vault overhead, which seemed to dam back the light that should stream through it, allowing a ghostly glimmer only to percolate.

On the poop the steersman, muffled to his chin, indifferently twirled the wheel. The water gurgled past the prow and sometimes sent icy dashes of spray on board. Deodato shivered, penetrated to the bone through his thin clothing, his fingers and toes still numbed by the sting of the hail. Slowly other sailing-boats, some with blood-red sails—a spot of colour at last!—came dipping down the stream and passed them in silence without salutations; and now and again a small steamer with churning paddle-wheels sent clouds of grit-laden smoke across their deck.

The rain had passed, but the sky had darkened. Was it night or day? Deodato rubbed his eyes with his hand, wondering if he were the victim of some terrifying dream. They were approaching the Pool now, and the masts of the congregated shipping there stood up black like the trunks of a burnt forest. Overhead all was funereal; from grey the sky had become a sooty colour, and at the horizon it let down veils of purplish haze, through which the funnels and sails of distant ships, the towering shapes of warehouses, the remote pencillings of towers and steeples were dimmed to irresolute blurs.

Here, however, was life. Streaming, the Italian thought, like shades from some obscure tartarean caverns, bearded figures thronged the wharfs, bending under packs, straining at derricks and pulleys. Barges floated by, with the lightermen writhing muscularly back from their giant oars like heroes of mythology bound to new variations of old torments. Every face seemed pale; the drooping beards and whiskers gave an air of resignation. The sombre forest of masts and spars grew denser; the inky turrets of the Tower loomed on the right; and suddenly in a sickly halo of sunlight a glint of gold appeared in the sky overhead. It caught Deodato's eye, together with the curve of the great dome it capped, and might have seemed for an instant to interpret the scene—the gold suspended like a vision to the view of the tugging, weight-supporting throngs along the river-bank, the tantalising gold, already fading in the battle of the sun and smoke.

(2)

The brig moored in the river opposite St. Katherine's dock, and Deodato, in company with the ship's cook, the Englishman, with whom he had practised the language a little, and who had agreed to come with him to look for a lodging, went ashore in a wherry rowed by an ancient waterman with an entangled beard and smouldering, drink-sodden eyes. The traveller from Italy was reminded by his tattered figure of the ferryman of Hell in the "Inferno." In the wherry with him Deodato carried a bundle that represented all his possessions—a spare shirt and a couple of pairs of socks, his drawing and painting implements, and his rosary, which, with the scapular bound round his shoulders, formed his last link with the world of religion. He had not wholly ceased to tell these beads or to murmur snatches from the night-prayers of the Franciscans before going to sleep. But the dogmatic notions of the Trinity, faith and redemption, which had been the topics of his enforced meditations as a friar, were dimming now behind a growing wonder at the world, a sense of awe and expectation deeper than any that the formal contemplation of the Four Last Things had ever stirred in his bewildered spirit.

Yet it was of the imagery of the Four Last Things, and again of scraps he had read in Dante, that he was reminded as they landed at some worn stone steps in the shadow of warehouse walls rising on either side like cliffs of sooted brick. At the top of the stairs sat a figure that made Deodato's teeth chatter. It was a woman wrapped in rags, with bare feet pressed on the slimy stones, and a white, starved face through which, as through transparent parchment, every bone showed, and every muscle in the throat like whipcord. Her blue-lidded eyes were closed, and she was leaning back against the wall in a sleep oppressed by rattling, phthisic breaths. In her arms, a bundle of similarly fetid tatters, a baby whined feebly; and round her dank skirts played a small girl of three or four years in a torn petticoat, a sea-jacket cut down to her size, and huge, gaping man's boots. Her eyes, pointed at the two sailors as they climbed the stair, were as fierce and shiny as a rat's.

"*Signore Dio!*" moaned Deodato, stopping to regard this group. He had seen penury and filth beneath the broiling Italian sky, but never this abject misery of suffering; and it ripped his heart across. He pulled out the handkerchief in which he kept his small store

of money tied up, and fumbled among the strange English coins for a copper small enough for him to spare. Suddenly the handkerchief was torn from his grasp and the whole of its contents sent rolling upon the pavement. The wizened little she-creature had made a bound and snatched at it. As Deodato and the sea-cook shouted and pounced upon the coins before they should roll away in the gutter the haggard imp clawed at a shilling and a half-crown piece, and hurtled away with them down an alley between two warehouses, made more shadowy still by bridges that crossed from side to side, her immense boots slapping the cobbles as she flitted like some human bat out of the sailormen's view.

The *mater dolorosa* did not stir at the excitement, though the mite in her arms sent up a shriller wail through the bleak air. The ship's cook raised a yell of "Stop thief!", and abruptly, as it seemed from nowhere, there appeared a blue-clad figure with lank whiskers and a leather top-hat, who demanded gruffly, "Nah then, what's all this 'ere?"

In his long, straight overcoat he looked to Deodato like a funeral mute, and harmonised perfectly with the scene. But as the English cook began breathlessly to explain, seeking to rush up the alley after the thief and being detained by the blue arm at every attempt, he realised that this was the English equivalent of a *carabiniere* or *guardia*, and with Latin distrust of the police begged the cook in Italian to make no complaint.

The foreign talk deepened the peeler's suspicions, and by the time confused explanations had been given and accepted any prospect of overtaking the pathetic little culprit had vanished. The bobby was highly philosophical and even sympathetic as soon as it was clear he was not to be put to the trouble of pursuing a fugitive and formulating a charge. "Like wermin they are," he commented, clapping his dark-gloved hands together against the cold; "they comes and they goes into their 'oles quicker nor chitterlings into a greased frying-pan, and a cove couldn't pinch 'em not if he was swift as lightnin'. Your friend'll 'ave to look closer than he did that time to his money in this 'ere London tahn, sailor! 'Ere! Wot's he up to nah?"

Both men turned about and stared at Deodato. He was standing in trembling horror, gazing at the woman on the steps.

"Wot's up, mate?" inquired the cook.

For answer Deodato pointed a shaking finger, and groaned, "*Ah! Signore Dio! Ah! Maria Vergine!*"

The policeman with professional experience was the first to understand. He stepped sharply across to the woman, and twisted her face towards him by the chin. No resistance came from her; her eyes glinted glassily from between the bluish lids. Now the sea-cook noticed, too, that her pulmonary wheezing had ceased. "Gawd!" he ejaculated.

The peeler bent over a moment, listening for her heart. Then he stood upright again with a curt nod. "She's a goner!" he pronounced. "Disease . . . exposure," he diagnosed coolly.

"*Gesù!*" sobbed Deodato. "And does no one care? Will no one do anything?"

The blast of the policeman's whistle cut short his lamentations. In a few minutes other blue-coated forms were stalking to the spot, and in time a Sergeant appeared. Round the men of law as they stood waiting for a doctor a fringe of early morning prowlers gathered, rustling and whispering at a cautious distance. Deodato marked their bright, hungry eyes, and felt again as if weird, semi-human rats had emerged from their holes in warehouse and sewer and mud.

The ship's cook had been watching in fascinated awe while the doctor and a stretcher arrived. Then turning with dreadful relish for a last look at the body, he gave an ejaculation of indignant amazement, which was growlingly re-echoed by the Police-Sergeant.

Deodato was kneeling on one knee in front of the dead woman. On the other knee he held a sketch-book, and in his hand was a pencil with which he was intently drawing—the poise of the head with its gaping mouth, fallen back against the wall, the hollow and jutting contours of the starved face, the strained cords in the wasted neck. He even picked up one of the cold hands for a moment in his, feeling the muscles, modelling it, as it were, in his ardent grip, and swiftly transferring his impressions to the paper. He had become unconscious of the mourning sky and sordid streets in which he knelt. Before his mental vision there wavered the outlines of a marble monument in some unknown church or piazza with "*Famine*" as its title. He must stop those outlines wavering, fix them, at least in their chief strains and balances, at once in his book.

"Well, I'm d——d!" said the cook. "I never did see nothink

like it. One 'ud think she wos a lump o' stone, the way you handles of her, mate!"

"A heartless fellow!" commented the Sergeant. "Furriner, a'n't he? I thought so. Move along, all of yer!"

(3)

Deodato had grown too well acclimatised to the conditions in cheap waterside lodging-houses at Naples to be much discomforted by Mother Cherrycap's Boarding House for Seamen in Wapping, to which his friend the cook introduced him. He noticed chiefly the freezing, penetrating cold and the dourness of the lodgers, who came and went without a word, and it would seem without a hope. One of them, a sailor in high boots and a jersey, sat reading a Bible by a dip half the night, and then fell forward with a crash on the floor. Deodato started from his straw mattress, fearing that this might be another tragedy of destitution; but a voice from the next bed said, "Never mind 'im, cully! Dead-drunk agin—charged to the nozzle wi' gin . . . the lucky dawg!", and Deodato sank back and tried to sleep again, more bemazed than ever at the country into which he had strayed.

He was up early in the morning to take leave of the sea-cook and to set out in search of Mr. Thomas Greeves, the *avvocato*, whose address, after some confused discussion at the boarding-house, was interpreted to him as Ely Place in Holborn.

The day seemed as gloomy as the one before, and was certainly colder. It had a bite and rawness such as the youth from Italy had never experienced, and as he hurried along through Eastcheap, hoping to warm himself by quick walking, he wondered how it could be so wintry in March. All over the Mediterranean shores they had skirted while coming along in the cargo-boat spring was already flourishing and drawing the greenery and the flowers from the soil. Here it might be the dead of winter; the few trees he noticed when crossing a wide street that led up to the river from the old wooden bridge of Southwark were black and leafless still.

At the juncture of several large thoroughfares, Deodato lost his vague sense of direction and stopped. Immediately he became aware of the swirl he was in. He was brushed aside and bumped into by a throng of foot-passengers coming at him, it seemed, from

all quarters at once, nearly all men in dark clothes and top-hats, most of them carrying shiny black or carpet bags, and all, it seemed, in a mortal hurry. He wondered what the throng was assembling for. Was it a *festa*? With their frowning concentration, and the brief nods or bitten-off words they used for greeting acquaintances, they did not look as if they were out for a festival. Was it a riot or a revolution? They were surely too quiet and orderly. Anyhow, Deodato thought, he had better wait until the crowd passed by.

It was not for about ten minutes that he realised that this was not a mob gathering at all. It showed no signs of passing by; it was an endless stream; it looked as if there were enough of it to go on all day. And suddenly Deodato felt frightened and dizzied. Besides the unabated jostling on the pavements, his ears were assailed by the thunder of drays laden with barrels, which kept jolting up from sunken yards and round corners; by the clattering hoofs and roaring wheels of carts, hackney-cabs, and strange shell-shaped vehicles for two with their jaunty, shabby drivers perched on little seats above their fares; by the lumbering omnibuses, crowded to the roof with passengers studying newspapers, and marked with huge gold letters on their sides. For a moment this turmoil seemed to revolve round the Italian boy, while the tall, red-brick houses, with fantastic chimney-pots thrusting themselves like heads in armour through the roofs, joined the solemn dance.

Then a poke in the back which sent him spinning into the arms of a seedy man in front, brought back his senses, and disentangling himself with muttered apologies, he resumed his uncertain course until, with the aid of directions from a friendly tobacconist standing beside the figure of a snuff-taking Highlander outside his shop in Ludgate Circus, he found his way up steep Holborn Hill and turned aside into the backwater of Ely Place.

He found the brass-plate of "T. Greeves, Attorney-at-Law and Notary Public" after going up one side of the place and down the other, and entered through an open door into a dingy little room marked "Enquire Within" where, protected from the curiosity of the street by a wire blind, a clerk with a tip-tilted nose and an enormous winged collar sat under a gas-jet, and looked up superciliously from his desk.

"Mr. Greeves can't see nobody this morning, my covey," he announced before Deodato could open his mouth.

"Will you please to tell him I am bringing a message?" answered Deodato, in his most laborious English.

"Vich I can't do that, neether," replied the clerk, taking the quill from behind his ear and applying himself to his papers again. "He's hout!" he added a minute later, with a brief glance upward.

"And, please, when will he come back?"

"Can't say, I'm shaw." The clerk did not even look up this time.

"Then I will, please, wait for him." Deodato sat down on a bench beside the wall.

After about ten minutes the clerk sat up to stretch himself, and noticed the stranger was still there. He stared at him long and insolently, but did not speak to him. Instead he called through a door behind his back, "Mr. Milliken!"

An elderly clerk with a stoop came in, and the two whispered together. Then the older man came round the table and spoke to Deodato, who rose with a bow to receive him.

"Would there be any name?" inquired Mr. Milliken.

"No name." Deodato shook his head.

"Well, but——" Mr. Milliken grew irascible. "You can't come into people's chambers and sit yourself down without a name, you know!"

"I am bringing a message, Signore," Deodato explained again.

"Message? Who from?"

"*Scusi, Signore*, that is for the *illustre* . . . for Mister Greeves to know."

He looked so steadily at the old man, that for all his thin lips and hard eyes Mr. Milliken appeared disconcerted.

"Make an appointment by letter," he snapped.

"Letter? No! I must speak with Mr. Greeves himself, Mister."

"Oh no, you won't, Mister! Just take yourself off! We don't want your sort here! You may be some confidence-trickster or even an area-sneak, for all I know!"

Deodato understood the tone better than the words. He frowned, and the bulging furrow in the middle of his forehead appeared, as he took a step forward. The snub-nosed clerk slid off his chair and disappeared into the back-office.

"Please not to speak to me . . . like that. I do not like it!"

"All right! All right!" Mr. Milliken retreated in his turn. "We don't want any fuss here!"

"Then I shall wait for Mister Greeves, thank you," said Deodato, polite again but resolute, and resumed his seat.

Mr. Milliken shrugged his shoulders and went back to his room. The snub-nosed one, after some agitated whispering within, at length reappeared and slid nervously back on to his stool. The scratching of his quill recommenced; the ticking of the clock on the wall of the passage outside asserted itself again; and as the minutes crawled by Deodato began to feel dismally that his affairs were not advancing at all.

He must have been there an hour and a half, which seemed longer than all the voyage from Italy, when there was a heavy step in the passage, and in strode a red-faced man dressed in black tails with a bunch of gold seals hanging from his fob. At sight of him the little clerk jumped off his stool and stood deferentially.

"Good morning," said the newcomer in a loud, challenging voice. "Mr. Greeves?"

"I'm afraid Mr. Greeves is out, sir," answered the clerk, and, half-turning, called through the door, "Mr. Milliken! Mr. Serjeant Villiers."

Mr. Milliken came trotting out with bowed back . . . "No, Mr. Villiers . . . I'm very sorry, Mr. Villiers . . . He won't come to the office at all to-day, I think. He's over at the funeral, you know."

"What funeral, Milliken?" challenged Mr. Serjeant Villiers, pinning him down.

"Lady Pontavis's, sir."

"Ah! yes, I saw it in *The Times*. She was only forty-one. Scarcely middle-aged—as they count nowadays—eh? Lord Pontavis must have been much older than she was when he married her . . . how many years has he been dead now? . . . But you know, Milliken, all this is deucedly inconvenient to me. I urgently wanted a conference with Greeves over Simpson and Callaghan. Surely he'll be back after duly burying Lady Pontavis?"

"I don't think so, sir." Milliken shook his head. "He'll be returning to the house to read the late Marchioness's will to the family."

"The house. What house?"

"The town house of the family, sir, in Hyde Park."

"Yes, I remember now. Big mansion with pillars near where Connaught Place joins the Edgware Road, isn't it?"

"Quite correct, sir. I'm afraid we shan't see Mr. Greeves here to-day, sir."

"Well, then he must see me to-morrow without fail. Put my name down, Milliken."

"Of course, Mr. Villiers. Shall we say one o'clock, sir?"

"No. Say noon. Don't forget." The Serjeant swung out of the office whistling, and when a few minutes later the snub-nosed one looked up to see whether the annoying fellow with his "message" was still on his bench, he noted with some surprise that he had, in the clerk's own terms, "cut his lucky, too."

(4)

Deodato at that moment, having gained a direction to Hyde Park from the watchman at the gates of Ely Place, was striding along New Oxford Street with the determination of a marching infantryman. He felt the audacity of his resolve to seek out the *avvocato* at the house of one of his most important clients. But it had become for him within the last quarter of an hour a matter of little less than life or death to find Mr. Greeves to-day. For while he listened to the interview between the lawyer's clerk and the great Mr. Villiers, his hand had strayed to his pocket, and with a cold shock he had realised that it had been cut right out, the twisted handkerchief and his remaining money in it—all gone! And he divined that it was the men who had jostled him at the street-corner where he was staring about him who had been the robbers. Anyway, he was without a *soldo* in London, in the claws of this black, bellowing, heartless monster! The thought seemed to suck all the courage out of him. In a day or two he might share the fate of the poor creature he had seen die of want before his eyes outside the docks! Luckily his sub-consciousness as he sat sweating registered in protective reaction the words, "Hyde Park. . . . Cornotte Place . . ." and thither he was now bound. If the lackeys at this great house threw him out, he would wait on the pavement till Mr. Greeves appeared. . . . He would put up with any indignity . . . anything rather than be stranded in London, horrible London, *senza un soldo!*

In this mood he arrived at last by a straight course before the sombre mansion of the late Lady Pontavis, fronting the leafless Park. The street in front of it was covered with straw, laid down during the Marchioness's illness to deaden the iron-bound wheels of the early market-carts coming into London. The blinds were drawn, the shutters fast-closed, the funeral hatchment of the Pontavis family displayed over the porch, the bronze wreath of the door-knocker swathed in crape. Mourning-coaches were drawn up outside the door; mutes were gathered with their black gloves, black-edged handkerchiefs and staves to escort the coffin on foot. Under the louring sky which overhung the Park the scene struck a shudder to Deodato's heart, for he loved no more than any other Latin the spectacle of death and its ceremonies.

Yet he held stoutly to his purpose, and observed better strategy than he had done at the lawyer's chambers. For, observing a number of men and boys going in with wreaths at a door in the blank wall of the house which opened through an alley on to the Edgware Road, he joined himself to the procession, and by saying authoritatively, "Mister Greeves," to the overworked and flustered servants, was able to follow two men from a fashionable florist's, carrying an enormous anchor of lilies, right up into the front-hall of the house.

Through double-doors open at one side he caught a glimpse of a black-clad and crape-veiled assemblage taking cake and wine from funkeys in maroon livery with mourning flashes on their collars. The hall-porter rose from his wicker-chair and waddled towards him enquiringly.

"Please, a message for Mister Greeves," repeated Deodato, and the porter, turning, called in a low tone to a gentleman who was that moment coming out of the dining-room. "A messenger for you, sir. One of your clerks, I think."

"I think not," said the family lawyer, a hollow-cheeked but hale-looking old gentleman with a fluff of grey whisker, wearing a heavy black cravat. "Who are you?" he demanded of Deodato, eyeing him keenly, but not the boy thought, unkindly, through gold-rimmed spectacles. Deodato realised that on his next words depended all his chance of making an impression upon this long-desired *avvocato*. He paused for just a second, and then said, "I come, Signore, with an important message from the Convent of San Francesco a Ripa at Rome."

"A letter?" Mr. Greeves had exhibited no shock, but his mouth had gone straight and compressed, his eyes harder.

"No, Signore, a message. . . . I am Brother Deodato," he added in a soft voice.

"How did you come here? This is not the place to bring me messages."

"If the Signore will permit me to explain——"

"Not now! . . . Hush! Stand aside! Right out of the way, behind the stairs there!"

The lawyer imperiously waved him from the foot of the staircase to the back of the hall, near the servant's door, as down the wide marble stair there came solemnly a personage so funereally cloaked as to proclaim the master of the burial ceremonies. He carried his crape-loaded top-hat in one hand, and with the other held a handkerchief before his face. Behind him a double line of mutes in similar trappings ranged themselves on either side of the stairway. The principal undertaker stalked to the doors of the dining-room, and there was an immediate hush in the decorous murmur of conversation, a rustle of skirts and the sound of company rising to their feet.

Despite Mr. Greeves' injunction, Deodato could not help edging forward nearer to the foot of the staircase again, drawn by a reluctant, painful interest. . . . With an intake of his breath he saw the coffin, draped in its immense pall, coming down the middle of the stair on the arms of its bearers; behind more mutes bore black plush emblems on poles. Slowly the coffin glided down the great stair to the accompaniment of shuffling feet; through the front-doors of polished walnut, thrown wide to give it issue, it passed into the cold spring light outside, where the plumed hearse with its ebony columns awaited it. Then out of the dining-room silently paced the mourners—a boy of about eight and a little girl heavily veiled and led by a governess walking first, with an elderly gentleman of military look. Deodato guessed that these were the children of the dead Marchioness, and an uncle. At a respectful distance the rest of the mourning throng followed, streaming through the doors to find places in the coaches.

Mr. Greeves made a movement as if to follow, and as he did so, found Deodato, to his surprise, at his elbow. He started just a little, and looked at him with an odd conflict between the grimness in his chin and the sympathy, almost compassion, Deodato thought,

in his eyes. Then, as an undertaker's man approached, offering him a sable-coloured cloak and a pair of black gloves on a tray, he took them and said quietly to Deodato as the man retired again, "You know where my chambers are? Yes, I thought so: I wonder what they were thinking of to send you on here. Go straight back there now, without speaking a word to anybody here, you understand, not a word . . . or I will do nothing for you. Have you any money? I thought not; you look as if you needed a meal. Take this; get yourself some dinner; and then wait for me at Ely Place. Be off with you."

Deodato thought it best to obey, with only a small bow of thanks. As soon as he had gone, Mr. Greeves, adjusting his mourning cloak round his throat, moved quickly through the hall towards the front doors. But as he went he darted a sharp, sidelong glance at an oil-portrait hanging on the wall. It was that of a woman in early middle-age, dark and authoritative, handsome in her aquiline way, with deep blue eyes, but with an obdurate mouth. Her identity was sufficiently shown by the Marchioness's coronet set on her corkscrew curls and the ermine cloak draped back from her shoulders to fall with incongruous medievalism upon her crinoline. Mr. Greeves's glance at Mabel, Lady Pontavis, as he passed her in the solitude of the hall, was beyond price, so discreet, was it, so respectful, so mischievous in its moment of unseen mockery.

CHAPTER TWO

MR. MICHAEL ANGELO

(I)

DEODATO felt like a man in a dream when he found himself back, after dining frugally at an Alamode Beef House in Holborn, in Mr. Greeves's chambers, on his old bench, with the same clerk scratching away with the same quill under the same gas-jet, now turned higher against the fading daylight.

His legs were very weary, and he was dropping into a doze when he was awakened by voices, and jumped up to see the lawyer entering the room, followed by a stout little man in mourning black, who remained in the shadow behind him. Mr. Milliken came hurrying out of the inner office to greet his master.

"Anything of importance, Milliken?" asked Mr. Greeves. "No? Very well, then, give me those letters, I'll look through them presently. Did a young fellow come—Ah! there you are, sir! Follow me, if you please. Mr. Marsh, if you care to draw up that estimate for the tomb, you will find a table in Mr. Milliken's room. . . . Help him, Milliken! . . . Just let me have the rough plan and a general estimate."

"E. and O.E., of course, Mr. Greeves," said Mr. Marsh, cocking his head to one side.

The lawyer smiled as he opened letters and glanced at them. "I see you're a very cautious man of business, Mr. Marsh," he said.

"Well, sir," Mr. Marsh coughed apologetically, before replying, "my first aim is nacherally to give the most ampial satisfaction to the distressful sentiments of my clients; and I don't like to give them, so to speak, an ill-conwenient jolt by intruding of hard facts at sich a moment. But this, as you say, sir, is a business, and must be conducted on business lines."

"Very reasonable. It will be all right, no doubt. Milliken, just find Mr. Marsh a table. . . . You come with me, young man."

He led the way down to the end of the passage, and took Deodato

into a large, gloomy room, the walls of which were lined with tin boxes bearing the names of titled and county clients, while a legal almanack hung over the fireplace and two busts of famous judges stood in corners.

"Sit down!" ordered Mr. Greeves, pointing to a wooden chair with curled arms facing his writing desk. "Now let me hear your story. . . . By the way, how *did* you come to find me at Connaught Place?"

Deodato explained how he had overheard the clerks in conversation with another gentleman, an *avvocato*.

Mr. Greeves seemed relieved. But all he said was, "Well, your story?"

The tone was not encouraging, and the hard chair did not promote ease. However, Deodato in the best English he could muster, stammered through the tale of his interview with the *Padre Guardiano* and his flight to England.

"In all this," said Mr. Greeves coolly, as he faltered to a finish, "I do not find the 'message' you spoke of at Connaught Place this morning."

Deodato flushed a little and spread out his hands. "I am very sorry, Mister; I had to say something that would bring me to you, you understand? It is I myself am the 'message' truly from San Francesco."

"H'm." The lawyer seemed unimpressed by the excuse. "Then I take it you do not come with the connivance of the monks."

"I beg your pardon, what is 'conniv——'?"

"They did not send you," said Greeves testily.

"By no means!" confessed Deodato, and again he fancied the lawyer looked relieved. "I run away from them," he added.

Mr. Greeves smiled for a second. "Rather an adventurous young person, are you not? Well, I am very sorry that you thought fit to come to me at all, Mr. . . . what is your name?"

"Ah! Mister! That is what I hope you would tell me."

Mr. Greeves was obdurate to Deodato's smile. "I know nothing about you, my dear sir, neither your name nor your parentage." He had been playing with a metal sand-holder for drying ink, which stood on his desk, and now dropped it with a decisive little ring. A cloud of sand blew out and sprinkled the table, some of it drifting into Deodato's eyes.

He wiped them before replying, with an angry flush rising into his

cheeks, "You know nothing? What for, then, are you coming to Rome all those many years ago, and asking all those many questions about me, and offering to bring me back to my parents in England? The *Padre Guardiano* he has told me——"

"What he ought not to have done. You can't trust these monks an inch. He should have known our conversation was in professional confidence!" Mr. Greeves seemed quite irritated. "In any case your inference is wrong. In the circumstances I conceive I shall not be violating professional discretion in repeating to you, simply, that a client of mine was interested in your fate—many years ago. Your mother, as it was put to me, had been in my client's service in some capacity or other, and when on her death-bed she confessed that she had . . . through poverty, I suppose . . . abandoned a male child in Rome, and was dying with a troubled conscience on that account, my client had the merciful idea of finding out whether you could be retrieved. I undertook the enquiries, as well as I could in a foreign tongue, but the monks were unaccommodating, and the scheme fell through . . . finally. That is all I may or can tell you."

There was a silence while the lawyer glanced at Deodato over the rim of his spectacles, evidently waiting to be questioned further. Instead, Deodato, who had been staring at the faded carpet, looked up and shot him a contemptuous look which said more gallingly than words, "You are lying!" Mr. Greeves cleared his throat and tugged at the corners of his collar. He was too much of a gentleman not to dislike intensely certain necessities of his daily work. However, he stifled the unprofessional feeling, remembering how far his discretion when the future Lady Pontavis told him her improbable story about her companion "Signora Carloni" had led him—even to the management of the Pontavis estate, and said, "I may tell you further that my client (I am naturally not at liberty to disclose her name) died some years ago."

"Or was it some days ago, Mister?"

"I beg your pardon?"

"Has she not been buried this morning? Oh! yes, it is unnecessary that you shall be telling more lies, Mister! I can read in your face now . . . just as I was reading in it this morning when the *bara* passed us by, all black!" he shivered. "The dead one! What was she to me? You know and you are not speaking. . . . But some day, Mister, believe me, I will know too!"

Mr. Greeves stared stonily at his desk.

"Good day, Mister," said Deodato, rising from his chair.

Mr. Greeves looked up with a jerk of his chin.

"Do you mean to go like this?" he asked.

"What for should I remain? You are not helping me at all!"

"I did not say that I would not help you at all. I beg you will be seated again." He pointed to the chair, and Deodato reluctantly walked back to it. Mr. Greeves sat for a moment in silence, studying his face. "He is saying to himself," Deodato suddenly divined, "that I am like my mother . . . or my father."

The lawyer quickly saw that he was being watched in his turn, and tapped on the table. "Now, Mr. . . . what the deuce am I to call you? You *must* have a name, you know. Well, first let me advise you to give up trying to solve the problem of your parentage. You have not the means to do so, and you never will have them."

Deodato shrugged his shoulders, and was silent.

"Next, you have to be provided for. I mean," added Mr. Greeves hastily, "put in the way of earning an honest livelihood . . . Unless," he suggested, "you should think fit to return to the monks?"

"Return to them? Impossible! Never!"

"I dare say you're sensible. A strapping young fellow like you should be able to do better for himself than crawl about a monastery on his knees, swallowing beads . . . or is it boiled peas? . . . and kissing the Pope's toe. You've come to the land of freedom, with all the world before you. . . . By the way, what can you do?"

"Do? Ah! yes, I understand! I have been a gardener . . . cook on a ship. . . . I *am* an artist."

"Artist?"

"The *scultura*. . . . I make faces."

"You make faces! Oh! I see. You mean portraits, busts, like those over there. . . . Why, how lucky! I've the very thing for you." He turned and jerked at a bell-pull, and Mr. Milliken appeared like a jack-in-the-box.

"Desire Mr. Marsh to step this way," said Mr. Greeves, and the clerk disappeared again.

"I believe, my young friend," said Mr. Greeves, rubbing his hands, "that I have found your niche! Rather good that, by the way, found the sculptor his niche!" He chuckled at the bewildered Italian, until the clerk showed in the little man in black.

(2)

"Ah! Mr. Marsh," said the lawyer, "have you drawn out the specifications? . . . Very good, place them on the desk here. . . . No, I'll look at them later," for Mr. Marsh had produced a folding-ruler from his breast-pocket, and was threatening to demonstrate. "Mr. Marsh," the lawyer leaned back in his chair with his fingers pressed together, "do you not require some smart young fellow to assist you in you . . . er . . . workshop? . . . An expanding concern like yours! You must be in constant need of fresh hands."

Mr. Marsh scratched his chin with the folding-ruler doubtfully. Deodato thought he had never seen a man with such a scarlet face. It was the more vivid by contrast with the silvery hair that was brushed back from his forehead in a crest like that of a bird of delicate plumage. In this glazed red face the most striking feature was the lower lip, which thrust itself forward in a pursed protuberance as though he were perpetually about to whistle. Combined with a thrusting chin, the mouth gave him an air of mingled scepticism and obstinacy, not belied by the shrewdness with which the little eyes twinkled.

He was evidently in obstinate mood at this moment, as he stood scratching his cheek, after his chin; though the wary way in which he eyed Mr. Greeves showed that he was anxious not to ruffle so important a client. "Well, I hardly know what to say, sir," he answered at length. "You see I've got three as good artists as you could want in my *studio*," he emphasised the corrective word, "at the present moment. One whom I engaged for roughing, can also execute scrolls, volutes, urns, Hopes—anchors, that is, of course—and *Mems*—skulls you'd call them. The second is pertickler strong on angels, cherubs, veeppers, inconsolables, all-legories, in fact, according to clients' tastes and purses. He treats every branch of the female form divine—within the bounds of modesty, of course, and the requirements of strictly funereal and monumental sculpture. The third, a foreigner, has his speciality in purely religious emblems, such as crosses and characters from the Scripchers . . . though most of my clients find 'em popish, and they nacherally comes werry expensive."

"Well! Well! interrupted Greeves. "I suppose these artists will some day need an assistant?"

"Ah! yes, sir." Mr. Marsh laughed. "An assistant, no doubt. But, if I may say so, a trained one."

"Well, this young man here *is* trained." The lawyer jerked his head at Deodato. "A young sculptor from the continent."

"Indeed? A foreign gentleman, is he?" Mr. Marsh turned to Deodato, and resolutely, but with the air of a man touching off an explosive, said, "*Voo . . . polly. . . . Francie?*"

Deodato stood up and bowed. *Oui, Monsieur, un peu. Mais je suis Italien.*"

"Thank you kindly." Mr. Marsh bowed in return. "It's very good of you to say so, and I'm sure I wish you all the same." He turned to Mr. Greeves with an air of much complacency. "You'd be surprised, sir, if you knew the way I came to pick up my French."

"I expect I should," replied the lawyer from his desk, where he was arranging papers. "What the young man actually said, however, was that he was an Italian. That, you will recognise at once, is a guarantee of his artistic abilities. Now, come, Marsh, can't you find him some kind of employment about your place. It . . . it would be a kindness to me, if you would."

Mr. Marsh's eyes started from their crimson pouches with curiosity. "Well, of course, Mr. Greeves, I'm werry anxious to obleege you, sir, in every possible way." He scratched his silvery head this time. "There's that boy, Sam Biggs, who mixes the plaster and sweeps the studio . . . he's earned the sack these last months if ever boy did, wasting all my time tossing with the pieman."

"Well, give it him, Marsh, give it him, at once, and let my friend here have the place."

"Well . . . to tell you the truth, Mr. Greeves, I was just wondering how Mrs. Marsh might take it."

"Mrs. Marsh, I should have supposed, was too sensible a woman to interfere in her husband's business arrangements."

Mr. Marsh looked extremely doubtful. "What wages would the young man expect, sir?" he asked hesitatingly.

"Very little at first, till he's shown he's worth something to you. Give him board and lodging to begin with, and the rest I'll settle with him myself. Come, isn't that a fair offer?"

"It certainly puts a very different light upon it, Mr. Greeves, and it's like your methods of dealing, if I may say so, sir." Mr.

Marsh brightened up, and proceeded to fold and pocket his ruler with the air of one who has done business . . . "When would the young man wish to start, and . . . er . . . what might his name be?"

"His name?" repeated the lawyer, who had begun to answer his letters, half-distractedly. "Oh, yes! You might call him Mr. Michael Angelo. I'm sure it's a name he can have no reason to object to . . . and he can start now, if you'll take him straight home with you."

"Oh!" Mr. Marsh seemed to find this a trifle abrupt. "I'm not sure that Mrs. Marsh . . ."

"She'll have to know sooner or later, my good man. And your new employee has nowhere else to sleep, you know, for I may tell you I don't intend to pay for a bed for him at the Saracen's Head or the Holborn Coffee House."

"Nacherally not, Mr. Greeves! Well, Mr. Michael . . . whatever it is, if you'll be so good as to step along with me, we'll be putting our best foot forward!"

"I want just one word with him in private, by your leave, Mr. Marsh. If you'll kindly wait in my clerks' room."

"Certainly, sir. And you'll let me know if the estimate for her late ladyship's tomb is satisfactory? It's bound to come high, you know, with four veepers, one at each corner and an eight-foot A.D.—Angel of Death, that is."

"I'm sure we can trust you to give us the most reasonable terms . . . and"—Mr. Greeves rose from his chair and astonished Marsh by shaking hands with him—"in taking charge of this young shaver, you'll be doing me personally a service, and a considerable one."

"Is that so, indeed sir?" In their curiosity Mr. Marsh's eyes assumed a boiled lobster appearance against his vivid countenance. "I'm sure I'm only too happy to be the least use to you, Mr. Greeves. You can rely on me, and '*Honey soot key mally pence*'!"

"I beg your pardon!" said Mr. Greeves sharply.

"A French saying, sir, vich I understand to mean, 'Come one—come all!' Not," added Mr. Marsh cautiously, "that I'm exactly prepared to take on any more young gentlemen in the studio just at present."

"You're not likely to be required to," the lawyer reassured him, "and I repeat that I am infinitely obliged to you. Now, Mr. Michael Angelo," he went on, as soon as Mr. Marsh had left the room, "I

hope the arrangement you have just heard me conclude is agreeable to you?"

Deodato shrugged his shoulders again. "How can I choose? It is at least my bread, until I can learn something more——"

"Permit me to take you up there!" interrupted Mr. Greeves sternly. "You have had the good sense to recognise that . . . er . . . persons in a certain position cannot be choosers, and though some men might expect a slight expression of thanks from a stranger they had used their good offices to find a place for . . . we will pass that. But, Mr. Michael Angelo will be extremely unwise if he pursues further inquiries of the kind he has suggested. First, because he will learn nothing by them. Secondly, because if he constitutes himself a nuisance to respectable people by advancing claims that might well be construed under the section 'false pretences,' it might not be difficult to obtain a conviction against such an exceedingly undesirable foreigner. I say this to warn you against letting yourself be inveigled, as it is just possible you might be, by certain sharp practitioners of the law—disgraces to it really—who would tempt you into their clutches by the promise of establishing some fantastic claim or other for you."

"I am not thinking," answered Deodato in a moody voice, "that I shall be asking the help ever any more of lawyers."

Mr. Greeves smiled rather grimly. "You may be wise, Mr. Michael Angelo, though I may not be wise to say so. Well, I have only to add that your advancement lies in your own hands. Marsh is a good employer; if you work, and show any capacity, you will no doubt do very well with him. If you are idle or drink or gamble, or if I hear of you visiting any other lawyer, I wash my hands of you. For the present, if you will call here every month, you will receive thirty shillings from Mr. Milliken, not as a payment to which you are entitled, but as an act of grace and kindness."

Deodato stepped up to his desk, and putting his hands on the edge of it, "You are afraid of me," he said, fixing his deep, luminous eyes on the lawyer.

"If you are not careful," retorted Mr. Greeves with asperity, "*you* will have reason to be afraid of *me*."

"I am not! But," he ran his hands through the two clusters of curls that were wont to fall over his temples in moments of emotion, "I cannot see my way . . . This money that you offer me? Is it grand, is it small? I do not know—but small, I

suppose. But it does not matter, I am used to live poorly. I take it because I feel here"—he laid his hand on the coarse shirt covering his breast—"I am having the right to it. It must be mine . . . or surely you would not give it me. In the time of the Lord God I shall be shown more. I trust my cause to Him!"

"I cannot quarrel with such a proper and pious resolve," answered the lawyer in a hushed and church-like voice, gazing down at his desk.

(3)

"We must step it out now, you know!" admonished Mr. Marsh, as they passed out of Ely Place just as the watchmen blew his curfew horn. "What!" he said, stopping suddenly. "Have you no top-coat and no veskit neither? That little bundle in your hand all your property? You want more clothes than them, my boy, for a Lunnon spring; we must see what can be done. Turn right! Lucky we've the wind at our backs, for it's a real cutting north-easter."

He strode along by Deodato's side as he talked with an odd pomposity, his arms swinging, his legs doing an incipient goose-step, his protuberant lip seeming to challenge the street, the passers-by and the weather.

In spite of their speed Deodato shivered. His new employer had truly described the wind. It reminded him of the *tramontana*, but it had an unrelenting razor-edge that even the *tramontana* lacked. There was little traffic abroad as they passed along mediæval Holborn with its peaked gables, timbered fronts and island of ancient houses thrusting into the middle of the wide streets just like an illustration to a Gothic romance. A half-moon of frozen silver set in cotton-wool clouds shed a ghostly light on the ramshackle tiles and carved beams. The few foot-farers they passed had upturned collars and hands clutching their top-hats; in doorways and arched passages huddled barefoot match-sellers; while, too blue even to shiver, a scarecrow figure moved slowly along the pavement by the Turnstile, bearing on its head a candle-lit paper lantern painted with the advertisement "' Judge and Jury !' The Laugh of the Era !"

"You look perished!" said Mr. Marsh abruptly, as they turned into Tottenham Court Road and the wind came more fiercely at

them. "We'll slip in here, and see what good a mouthful of pig's ear will do you."

"The ear of a pig?" inquired Deodato.

"Beer, my boy, beer! I was only indulging in a little rhyming-talk, if you understand what I mean . . . I see you don't; how should you?" he added pityingly, as they dived down a narrow stone passage, pushed open a half-glass door, and entered without warning into a world of warmth, brightness and colour.

The public-house, in fact, was all a-glitter. The gas-globes shone in branches of gilded foliage; the mirrors reflected the crowd round the bar with brilliancy; the giant barrels with their polished brass bands, the gleaming handles of the beer engines, the copper curls of the barmaids under their mob-caps, the huge fire bellowing up the chimney, all gave their quota of illumination. For a moment Deodato felt almost faint at the change of temperature, the rank smells of beer, badly-washed humanity and coarse tobacco smoke. Mr. Marsh piloted him to a bench, and he sat down resting his head a moment on his hands.

Then he looked about him, amazed at the contrast between this garish interior and the spectral melancholy of the streets outside. The red coats of two or three soldiers, the plaid skirts and claret velvet jackets of the women who were drinking with them, the checked trousers, white waistcoats and massive imitation Albert watch-chains of some city clerks "out for a spree," the loudly rouged cheeks of the barmaids, the black faces, paper collars and blue-striped trousers of a band of "Ethiopian Serenaders" combined in a crude and glaring carnival. The laughter, the shouting and the deep-voiced talking filled Deodato's ears till they buzzed.

Then Mr. Marsh was at his elbow, holding out a mug of some bitter, hot liquid, which certainly warmed him as soon as he had drunk it, and sent a tingling right to his tired toes.

"That made a man of you again?" His employer was standing looking down on him, his pursed lips jutting, his little eyes twinkling in the kindest fashion. "I could see you wasn't used to a Lunnion March night with a nor'-easter blowing; it takes some hardening to get used to that. I s'pose in Italy now you don't know what cold is?"

"Cold? Oh, yes. It is very cold sometimes. But not to stay long."

"A queer place it must be!" Marsh buried his face in his ale-mug, and withdrew it with his long lip streaming. "However do you get used to the noise, may I ask?"

"What noise, Mister?"

"All them hurdy-gurdies grinding away at vunce in all the streets! Must be deafening, even if you like organ music, vich I *don't*. What part you come from?"

"Rome."

"A-a-ah!" Mr. Marsh shook his head darkly. He evidently felt his new assistant had escaped from peculiarly grave spiritual dangers which it were more decent not to specify. He took another drink, and as he wiped his pouring lip with his black cuff, he said, "I think you better not mention that fact to Mrs. Marsh, you know"; and as Mr. Michael Angelo looked puzzled, he added, "Well, you can't expect her to like it, can you? She being one of the Sisters of Miriam's Timbrel at our chapel, who are werry down on the Pope, *werry* down on him, I must say. Perhaps we'd better say you come from country parts like . . . Will you have another drink? . . . No? . . . Then I will, vich I won't deceive you. I don't know werry vell what it is about the sacred and movin' associations amid which my lot is placed, but they do give me the werry dickens of a thirst. I don't know any man with a stronger one in the City simmeteries or the outside ones either." As he moved to the bar again, he said over his shoulder with a wink, "No need, mind you, to tell Mrs. Marsh, when we get home, jist how many pints of 'life's a wale' you saw me drink to-night."

Whatever their exact number—and Mr. Marsh drank very slowly but with exquisite enjoyment—he did not seem to find that thirst of his satisfactorily quenched before Deodato, tired of staring about him, had extracted his little bent-backed sketch-book and pencil from his bundle, and covered a page with heads—the guardsman's hooked nose and pill-box forage cap, the barmaid's elderly, lined fatigue beneath the gaiety of her rouge and false curls, the toothy grin of a youth in a spotted belcher and gamekeeper's cap. Mr. March, returning from his fifth or sixth visit to the bar, stared at these productions until it seemed as if his predominant lip would have curled right over and turned itself inside out if he had not pinched it violently with his fingers. "Well, I never!" he exclaimed. "Well I never! Meanter say you did all those vith that little bit o' pencil? What! Jist that little stump o' pencil

in your hand." He took it and turned it round in his fingers as if there were some trick about it. Then he set his mug down upon a table, and wiping his lips all along his sleeve said, "Do you know what you are, my boy? A mystery! That's what you are."

Deodato smiled at him wearily.

"Oh! it's no manner o' use your trying to deceive *me*. I pierced through you at once, moment old Wheatsheaves spoke to me about you. Vy, I says to myself at vunce, 'That lad's a mystery! And now a'n't it proved true? Tell me now, as between friends, who are you and what's your reel name?'"

"I do not know," sighed Deodato.

"And wouldn't tell me if you did, I s'pose. Not you!" Mr. Marsh looked annoyed.

"Excuse, I pray you! I must now do what Mister Greeves commands—keep my mouth shut."

"He's an oyster, is old Wheatsheaves," grumbled Mr. Marsh. "But I quite reckernise your position. You can't afford to quarrel with him; no more can't I. But, mark you, Mr. Michael—d'you mind if I call you Mike? it sounds more friendly like—you won't be able to keep your secret from *me*. Mystery's my food. There's not a crime reported in the papers that I can't give an explanation of quicker than the detective perlice. I can tell 'em at once: 'This 'ere is burglary; that there is murder; that other is r-r-rape!' Not that you need be afraid you'll come by any harm when I do nose out your secret. No. It'll probably be something werry much to your advantage." Suddenly the little man threw himself into a strange attitude, one hand supporting his elbow, the other stroking an imaginary chin-tuft. "There is something here that escapes me," he drawled hollowly. "We will bring it to the light! Now come on, Mike; we're devilish late for supper."

They pursued their way along the dreary, interminable length of Tottenham Court Road, lit by sparse gas-lamps.

"Cheer up, Mike!" said Mr. Marsh at long last. "We're close to the New Road now, and that means home and beauty for you . . . yes, I think there's no doubt you might have called Mrs. Marsh a fine voman in her own style when I married her . . . what I might call without disrespec' the forty guinea, 'Vaiting for the Brighter Dawn' style of figure—vithout wings. No one could deny *then* she was a befitting partner for a man of my perfession. Now—vell, we'll say England—certainly; Home—I trust you'll

make it one, Mike ; Beauty ?—vell, mem'ry has her delights, and here we are, my lad ! ”

While he thus chattered with a slight tipsiness, they had turned off up a narrow road to the left, and stopped outside a yard that for a moment made Deodato feel his long day had certainly been a nightmare of which this was the wild conclusion. For, ranked behind railings as prim and regular as those in front of the other flat-faced, drab little dwelling-houses in the road, stood a ghostly population of statues, all of the same dingy, dirt-streaked grey in the moonlight. Angels with enormous symmetrical wings pointed flabby fingers up at the chimney-pots ; middle-aged females, with marble robes decorously draped round their ankles so as to display one fat great-toe, embraced ivy-grown crosses with chaste restraint ; gaunt forms in veils drooped over memorial tablets with an oddly jaunty kick of their out-turned heels ; petrified anchors buried their points in the pebbles ; giant urns and over-turned torches with a slag of stone flame curling from the key-pattern of their brims lay about like the debris of a ruined Titan's palace ; cherubs' heads, whiskered with tiny wings, smirked to right hand and to left.

“ *Dio mio !* ” gasped Mr. Michael Angelo, clinging in genuine horror to the iron spikes of the yard gate. “ What are all these ? ”

“ Stock ! ” replied Mr. Marsh with equanimity, fitting his latch-key into the front door of the house.

DOMESTIC INTERIOR

(i)

“STEP in here just a minute!” Mr. Marsh opened a door out of a dimly lit passage covered with shiny yellow wall-paper into a darkness thick with the smell of muslin curtains. He felt for his lucifers; there was a prolonged scraping; and the gas-jet, in a pink shade shaped rather like the funerary urns outside, flashed into life. Mr. Michael Angelo’s satiated senses were then regaled with a composition of which the main features were a round mahogany table bearing a magenta-coloured flower pot with a weeping maidenhair fern in it; six horsehair-covered chairs ranged round walls on which roses bloomed as large as cabbages; and two oil-paintings, one showing dead game on a table, the other a ruined abbey on a headland geologically formed of slabs of chocolate, and assailed by apple-green waves with neat white frills. The stone mantelpiece appeared to have been selected by some master hand for the carving of a model of a Gothic cathedral, but to have been abandoned after three or four ogival depressions had been scooped in it. The windows were swathed like Oriental beauties in many folds of muslin, with outer hoods of greengage velvet fringed by worsted balls.

“I expect,” said Mr. Marsh, with a faintly apprehensive note in his voice, “that Mrs. Marsh will be with us in a minute.”

Actually they did not have to wait a minute. There was a rustle in the passage outside; the door opened wider; and preceded by the curve of an enormous crinoline, Mrs. Marsh entered the parlour.

Mrs. Marsh wore a brown lace cap over grizzling hair plastered down upon her forehead to each side of a middle parting. In her ears tinkled violin-shaped earrings of black enamel, ornamented with a gold line, and chipped at one corner. Her large pale eyes had a peculiar gleam behind their steel-rimmed spectacles. They

seemed as they looked at you to expand and expand until they completely invested you, without, however, allowing you to gather from their expressionless luminosity whether she was surprised, indignant, menacing or only faintly amused at you. Her nose was a huge blob, her mouth a line that ran into her cheeks on either side like a needle. Her figure resembled the ram of an ironclad, jutting forward at the base with tremendous energy, and receding as it tapered upwards till, with her clasped hands displaying a thick gold wedding-ring on their chapped expanse, she seemed to be perpetually trying to pull herself over backwards.

As she stood silent on entering, just inside the doorway, Deodato became aware that she had fixed those expanding eyes upon his boots. This made him very uncomfortable, as he could not understand what fascination his outworn footgear could have for her, and he could not bury his feet in the carpet, which he now perceived to be a flower garden on its own account, growing out of a muddy soil.

Mr. Marsh, however, was quick to read the meaning of his spouse's stare. He looked shamefacedly himself first at Deodato's boots and then at his own. "I'm sure, m'dear, I meant to ask the gentleman . . . the young feller . . . er . . . Mr. Mike . . . to take 'em off, just as I could a' sworn I *had* taken mine off. But coming in in the dark, and showing him the way, it slipped out of my mind."

"Nobody," announced Mrs. Marsh in a voice that, as it were, squeaked at the corners, "*nobody* comes into my parlour with dirty boots on, and I should a' thought it would a' bin more fitting to tell the gentleman."

Deodato now realised that the mud he appeared to be standing on was only pattern, for the carpet and the rest of the room were swept, brushed, scoured and polished till they must have had quite a raw skin. He was also conscious that Mrs. Marsh's eyes had now a mixture of deference and defiance in their steadily enveloping movement.

"This m'dear," said Mr. Marsh, coughing importantly, "is a foreign gentleman who has come to visit us."

Again there was a momentary gleam of deference in Mrs. Marsh's look, though it was quickly quenched by the unspoken, but plain reflection, "Too shabby for a gentleman."

"Mr. Michael Angelo," continued her husband, "for that, I will not deceive you, is the gentleman's name"—Mrs. Marsh

frowned at such nomenclature—"is recommended to us by Mr. Greeves. He is . . . er . . . offered to us as a likely person to make a sculptor; he was trained in . . . er . . . foreign parts . . . and I was thinking he might take Sammy Biggs's place."

"This," said Mrs. Marsh, "is very sudden. I do think Mr. Greeves might a' given us time to consider of the person, whether we find him sootable or not. However, what's done is done, and, not wishin' to say anything disagreeable to the . . . young man"—her eyes challenged Deodato to protest against this definite relegation from genteel status—"I hope he understands, once and for all, that nobody comes into my parlour from the street without putting on slippers."

"Take off your daisy roots," murmured Mr. Marsh explanatorily to Deodato. "I don't suppose," he went on briskly, as though relieved by the senior partner's relatively tranquil acceptance of the situation, "I don't suppose m'dear that Mike'll trouble your parlour werry much. He'll be out in the studio at the back all day, and running errands and making hisself generally useful; his meals he'll take with me in the kitchen . . . except o' course on Sundays, when I've no doubt you'll allow him to take his saint-and-sinner with the rest of us in here."

"Where will he sleep, Marsh?"

"We-ell, we must see to that. We a'n't too conveniently placed, Mr. Mike, for purwidin' apartments to single gents. You see, there's o'ny our own two bedrooms on the first-pair front, and our daughter's, the little back room overlooking the studio."

"Yes," interjected Mrs. Marsh, with dire significance. "My daughter's! I consider you should a' thought o' that before, Marsh."

"Oh! there's nothing in that, I assure you, nothing at all," answered her husband with hurried lack of conviction. "The attic, where we should nacherally put the servant-gal, if Mrs. Marsh could bring herself to keep one, is at present full of lumber and small samples, I.W.'s—immortal wreaths—*ad lib* cherubs and so forth. So reelly I think it'll have to be a shake-down across the yard—in the corner of the studio itself."

"Ah!" said Mrs. Marsh in a more satisfied tone. "That sounds more like. He'll be out o' the way over there, and he'll be a guard against burgulars breakin' in . . . I've never been 'appy in my mind since that dawg died."

"Well then," said Mr. Marsh, rubbing his hands, "what about supper. I'm precious hungry, I can tell you, *and* dry," he added with guilty emphasis. "Didn't I say coming along, Mike, how dry I was?"

(2)

He led the way forthwith to the kitchen at the back, which was in the most striking contrast possible both to the ghostliness of the dim passage and the freezing gentility of the front-parlour. It was rugged as a cave, for the walls had simply been washed over with some pink distemper, and the stone floor was only partly covered by a couple of rag mats. But cheeriness glowed from the fire on the arched brick hearth, and gleamed from the faces of the Toby mugs on the ledge above and from the painted crockery on the dresser shelves. There were several windsor chairs and an ancient wicker arm-chair, with a sagging seat that suggested comfort. A rack of churchwarden pipes hung above the Toby mugs; the windows were curtained with gay chintz; on the hob a kettle purred; and as the two men warmed themselves at the red coals Mrs. Marsh began, not exactly to bustle—the word could not be used of her—but to glide about the room and in and out of the tiny scullery adjoining, like a galleon tacking over a quiet sea, making preparations for her tea and their supper.

The only melancholy thing in this homely room—which, from Mr. Marsh's air of *détente* as he put on his carpet slippers, was clearly his favourite refuge, was a large framed certificate of honour from the Associated Corporation of Monumental Masons, portraying in its centrepiece a sumptuous and endless funeral, with black horses arching yard-long tails and battalions of mutes, the whole winding its way through a cemetery so richly adorned with the trophies of Mr. Marsh's art that it looked like some dismal, undiscovered Nineveh.

"Has my little paper come, Rachel? You know, the *Police Gazette*?" enquired Mr. Marsh during one of his wife's stately swoops from scullery to fireplace.

"No," she retorted, "and neither of *us* is going to ask for a thing like that at the newsagent, I can tell you."

"Oh! come now!" pleaded Mr. Marsh. "Law and justice! No country can't get along without 'em . . . I admit some o' the cases are a bit rorty!"

"And you leave 'em about for your wife and daughter to see!" Mrs. Marsh was busy over the oven with a welsh rabbit.

"I'm sure I think better of you both, m'dear, than to dream you'd look at em!"

"Isn't it enough to waste your money having that there noo *Daily Telegraph*, besides a Sunday paper, which a Christian man wouldn't read of a Sabbath, but you must 'ave this shocking *Police Gazette* left too?"

"My dear, every man must have his relaxations. If you spent all your days in simmeteries, measuring graves and choosing inscriptions for sorrerin' fam'lies, and contemplating the marble limbs of irresponsive females, you'd like a nice, tasty bit o' *crim. con.* or a strong, juicy murder to cheer you up like of an evening—I mean, s'posing you was a man, o'course."

"A nice way to talk! We'll have you goin' to the theatre nex', Marsh!"

Mr. Marsh looked extraordinary guilty, and enquired quickly whether supper wasn't ready.

"I'm dishin' it now. And if the young man don't fancy welsh rabbit and brown ale, then," said Mrs. Marsh, folding her arms with a resigned air, "I dunno *woi's* to be done!"

"Oh! Mike a'n't pertickler!" Mr. Marsh re-assured her. "Ever tasted welsh rabbit, young feller m'lاد? No? Then you've a treat afore you! Nobody can do 'em to a turn like the Missus can—don't let it burn in the oven, will you, m'dear? And as for the 'life's a wale,' pass me the jug! If he a'n't thirsty, I am!"

"I know," pursued Mrs. Marsh, dividing the welsh rabbit into two portions, for she had had her own beer and pickles supper earlier in the evening, "I know who put you in the way, Marsh, of all this nonsense about crime and detekshun and myst'ry. I wish you'd never met that man. I never knew no good come of hob-nobbin' with forriners."

"My dear!" expostulated Mr. Marsh, "my *dear*!" He pointed a tactful fork at Deodato; but the morsel of welsh rabbit on the end of it unfortunately fell off onto the painfully scrubbed kitchen stones, and domestic strife ensued.

"Where's Madeline?" asked Mr. Marsh presently, as the last of the supper disappeared.

"In bed," answered Mrs. Marsh curtly, clearing away. "Long ago."

"A'n't she well, then?" enquired Mr. Marsh with solicitude.

"One of her headaches, she says. I told her, 'Get to bed then, and rub the menthol on it.'"

"She suffers a terrible lot from them headaches," said Mr. Marsh sympathetically. "It's a rum start."

"She can think herself lucky," Mrs. Marsh tossed the tablecloth into the drawer, "not to 'ave to suffer worse things, yes, far worse. Headaches, indeed! I'm sure, my pore legs——"

Mr. Marsh suddenly uttered a howl like a Red Indian leaping from ambush. As his wife opened the lower cupboard of the dresser to put a tray away, he had detected, in a corner, the pink glow of his precious paper. He made a pounce; there was a rustle of leaves; and soon silence possessed the kitchen except for the ticking of a round-faced clock upon the wall, Mrs. Marsh having departed upstairs, and Mr. Marsh having disappeared behind the pages of his favourite organ, only a curl of smoke from his churchwarden testifying to the presence of the quiescent volcano.

Deodato sat idly studying the wood-cut on the opposite side of the page that Mr. Marsh was reading. It represented without reticence some highly unpleasant things being done to two young women with very large eyes and very long hair. He felt extremely depressed, and, what was worse, imprisoned. The coarse smells of the little kitchen, new to his nostrils, seemed at moments to choke him, and the thought of the labyrinth of lonely streets all around, with their rows of gas-lamps stretching away into the dark, made his skin prick a little. He could only escape from the confinement of the house into that formidable maze outside, in which he would be still held prisoner. Sinister streets with those yellow eyes watching through the silence . . . for what?

"This is a rum go, too!" said Mr. Marsh suddenly, looking over the top of his paper. "Seems as if it a'n't safe for a respectable female to cross the road after dark nowadays. It happened in Camden Town . . . that's o'ny about a quarter of an hour's walk from here, you know. Wife of a corn-chandler she were, mother of three, nothink whatever suspicious about her or her succumstances. She went out at six-forty-five on Tuesday last to buy a cabbage for her husband's supper . . . she never come back . . . and she . . . a'n't . . . been . . . seen . . . since. What do you make o' that, Mike?"

"I do not know," murmured Deodato.

"Then, I'll tell you, my boy! Abduction, that's what it is. Abduction! Just at the busiest time o' the ev'nin' up in them parts, when everyone's doin' their shoppin'! Do you know the number of people wot disappears annivally in London? Somethink enormous! . . . And lucky if it a'n't no worse!" Mr. Marsh took a long pull at his ale-mug, and resumed. "It's a werry queer place to be in is Lunnon. What would you say to the gemman in the coal and greens line livin' out Pentonville way, wot come 'ome, opened the cupboard for the cheese-board, and found—what d'you think?—a yuman arm, freshly severed!"

Deodato shuddered.

"Makes you think, don't it? This city's fuller o' myst'ries nor any other in Europe, I don't care vich. For why? It stands to reason, Mike. It's chock-full o' furriners—I don't mean," he interposed hastily, "nice young chaps like you, Mike—but anarchists, members o' secret societies, Irish rebels, heathen Chinees down by the docks, and wot not . . . I could tell you somethink about that too . . . What would you say to anarchists trying to murder a furrin gentleman in daylight in one of our principal simmeteries? . . . Someday p'raps I'll tell you that story . . . and what I saw with my own eyes. Yes, indeed, it's a werry queer place to be in is Lunnon. Things happen that fair startle you."

He was leaning forward to tap Mr. Michael Angelo's knee for emphasis, when from behind the walls came a shrill scream which made Deodato jump in his chair. Mr. Marsh shook with laughter. "Startled *you*, did it? . . . It was o'ny a mouse . . . Listen to 'em, though! . . . Although this is a new house, they scurry about and squeal as if they wos expectin' somethink to happen here. Sometimes they make me feel odd, too, I can tell you"; he made his arm-chair creak with his delighted squirmings. "It's enough to raise your Barnet sometimes! And we don't keep a cat, 'cos the Missus can't abide 'em . . . Yes, it's a werry queer place . . . Hush! there goes the peeler! . . . Hear his plates o' meat? . . . You can set your clocks by him . . . I sometimes vunder if the criminals know it too."

He fell silent while Deodato sat listening to the clumping tread that went past the house in slow time and died away up the street. "Well," resumed Mr. Marsh, now fairly set on his darling topic, "as I was saying, a great city like this is full o' secrets that would

make your flesh creep if you knew 'em. Suppose you could take the roofs off all these rows of houses! . . . I often lie awake at night thinking this . . . wot strange things you'd find being said and done. They say there's a skellinton in every cupboard. I dunno about that. I never," he owned regretfully, knocking the ashes out of his pipe into the grate, "found nothin' in the least like one in any of ours; but, of course, this is a new house. Still, you'd find secrets that would appal you in the most respectable fam'lies. Yes, you take it from me, Mike, there's men that has driven into the City this werry day in their own kerridge and pair, and women wots dancin' at this moment at sinful balls, loaded with jewellery, and fair stunners for looks, too," he licked his protuberant lip with an ecstatic slobber, "wot goes about *haunted*, haunted by ghosts in their own houses——"

"*O Signore Dio!*" The words came in a gasping cry from Deodato, who this time leapt right out of his chair. Mr. Marsh, with a puzzled expression, slewed round in his seat and stared through the open door into the blackness of the passage.

"There is someone there! I saw someone who is moving . . . it is a woman!" declared Deodato, the perspiration lying on his forehead.

(3)

As Marsh leaned forward, peering, his hands upon his knees, the shadows in the passage thickened and rippled; then with an abrupt, quick step a young woman appeared in the doorway.

She was dressed in a nightgown of thick flannel, under which her feet, with their long toes quivering, peeped upon the black rag mat. Round her shoulders a drab-coloured shawl was flung; on her head a mob-cap, fallen awry, allowed coils of coffee-coloured hair to fall upon her shoulders. Her face was white and dazed, the heavy lips open, the eyes, of a dead black colour, staring.

Marsh at once jumped out of his chair, and went to meet her in the doorway. "Madeline, my dear! Madeline!" he exclaimed with a gentleness in his voice that Deodato had not heard him use before "What hever is the matter with you? What on earth are you out of your bed at this time for?"

"I was . . . I was . . . frightened!" replied the girl in a husky whisper.

"Frightened? What of?" Mr. Marsh chided her affectionately. "There a'n't nothing for you to be frightened of in this house, I'm werry sure! Why, you bin dreaming, my chick, that's what you bin doing, dreaming!"

With a flowing movement of her limbs, the sight of which sent a queer sensation through Deodato, she flung herself on Marsh's shoulder, and crouching there, for he was shorter than she was, burst into a tumult of hoarse sobs, gasping half-inaudible words to him, of which Deodato could only make out the phrase several times repeated, "Somebody comin'! Somebody comin'!"

"Na-oh! Na-oh!" contradicted Marsh, patting her in the small of her back. "Nobody a'n't coming . . . leastvays nobody as 'ud harm you . . . You bin dreaming, I tell yer! And look here, Maddy, this a'n't the thing, you know! Don't you see I've a young man with me here? He didn't ought to see you in your dishy-billy like this!"

With another of those fluid movements that affected Deodato so strangely, Madeline drew back from the mason's embrace, glancing from under sullenly lowered eyebrows at the stranger. Then, with a sound that was half a gulp and half a cry, she fled from the room into the shadowy passage again.

Marsh followed her out, and his footstep could be heard ascending the stair and passing overhead. Deodato waited for his return, fidgeting uneasily up and down the kitchen with its stuffy smells. The clock ticked throatily; the cinders of the dying fire fell down with a rustling noise; behind the walls the mice scurried again. The recent apparition had been the last shock to Deodato's nerves after the events of this exhausting, unending day. The girl's sudden entry, her strangeness had thoroughly shaken him. All his nerves seemed to tingle, and her white face with its lost look was still vivid in his imagination. It came between his eyes and whatever he tried to look at—the mugs on the mantelshelf, the plates on the dresser, the black funeral procession on the scroll moving through its wilderness of white marble.

An ugly face he kept telling himself irritably. The gaping mouth, the dead, inky eyes, with mauve shadows below them, the lined and flabby fall of the pallid cheeks—ugly! An ugly head—the shape of a turnip, he told himself; and as he did so the face floated towards him again. He saw the silky, dark-brown arch of the eyebrows, almost felt the softness of the coffee-coloured curls

tumbled over her shoulders. "But she has a neck like a piece of wood!" he protested, "no curve . . . no *mollezza*!" and at the same moment was obsessed by her rippling movement when she had flung her arms round Marsh's neck, the fluidity of her, the penetrating quality of her body—though he had not touched her or even stood near her.

The steps of his employer returning along the passage with a rug on his arm awoke him from his reverie with a start.

"Maddy's back in bed," said Marsh; "that girl's had a lot of trouble, Mike, I may tell you, and not through her own fault, whatever they may say, not reely. Now," he yawned, "if you're ready to turn in, I'm sure I am. I must find a candle for you. There's no gas in the studio unfort'nitly."

He rummaged for a candle in the cupboard, and fitted it into a flat stand of blue enamel; after which he led the way through the scullery into a paved back-yard, which was blocked a few yards from the house by a low, wooden shed. Still carrying the rug, Mr. Marsh unlocked this with a heavy key, and a smell of damp plaster came out as he entered, waking wavering shadows.

Deodato lingered in the yard. The bitter wind had dropped, and the moon now shone brilliantly from a bed of dark-blue velvet. A brick wall separated the back-yard of Marsh's house from that of his next-door neighbour; and standing on tip-toe Deodato could discern a vista of these protectors of privacy stretching to the east end of the street. On the other side a higher wall cut off the yard from a small street or alley, across which was the big work-room where by day masons and their labourers toiled on plain head-stones, kerbs and corner-posts, in clouds of dust and a perpetual noise of hammering and sawing. Beyond this appeared, above goblinous chimney pots, a meagre classical cupola, and beyond that again a wide, flattish dome rising amid the tops of trees. These shapes were so unexpected that Deodato yet again felt a doubt whether he were not the prey of a fantasy.

"Come on, Mike!" breathed Mr. Marsh's voice from the door of the studio. "What are you hanging about for? Your shake-down's ready!"

"That *duomo*!" asked Deodato pointing over the wall. "What is it, Mr. Marsh?"

"Never mind that now!" expostulated Marsh, coming yawning out of the studio. "That's the Regent's Park, if you want to

know, that you're a-pintin' at . . . and that dome over there, if it's what you're askin' about, is London's pride—the Colosseum ! ”

“ The Colosseum, Signore ! . . . The Colosseum . . . here ? In London ? It is impossible ? ”

“ Why so ? It's a pannyrama, and some day p'raps you and me'll pay it a visit. It a'n't a sinful show like a theayter, you know. Only dissolvin' picters and so forth, no actors or such-like.”

“ But why,” enquired Deodato bewildered, “ why are you calling a place like that the Colosseum ? ”

“ Why not ? ” enquired Mr. Marsh testily. “ It's big enough, a'n't it ? I'll go bail you haven't got one to match it in Rome ! ”

CHAPTER FOUR

THE STUDIO

(1)

THE next morning after breakfast Deodato was, so to speak, formally inducted into the studio, from which his sleeping arrangements had early been removed, by Mr. Marsh. That good man was already slightly harassed by the scene attending the dismissal of Sam Biggs, who had accepted the sack in no Christian spirit, but with shrill threats against the "shabby furriner," who had deprived him of (he declared) his bread; and when Mr. Marsh entered the shed with his new assistant he found more cause for annoyance.

A loud noise of talking and laughing had stopped short as they came in, and only the sound of a hammer and chisel, and the drip of water into a bucket from a model enveloped in damp cloths could be heard. But a broom and a pair of torn braces lying in the middle of the floor seemed to indicate that something in the nature of a conflict had lately taken place, and this was also suggested by the ruffled looks of a short, fattish man owning a face rather like a duck's, who, with his downy hair standing on end and his eyes watering, was smoothing down the blue apron he wore and trying to restore order to his appearance.

"Now, reelly, now, men! You reelly must NOT!" wailed Mr. Marsh with a plaintive assertion of authority. "I'm surprised at you! I reelly am! Apart from the fac' that all this larkin' is taken out o' time I pay you for, I should a' thought the sacred an' affecting character of your work would a' taught you the propriety——"

Deep guffaws burst from the other two men in the studio. One, who had his hands already steeped in the clay of a model he was attacking on its wooden armature, was a lanky, black-browed fellow in shirt-sleeves, with a long, sardonic chin, as blue as an actor's and slightly awry. His hair was in ringlets, falling greasily on his collar, and his eyes rolled in a humorous style, contradicting his

general look of a tragedian. His black satin stock was adorned by a classic medallion; his low-cut, double-breasted waistcoat was fastened by safety-pins where one or two of its mother-of-pearl buttons were missing; and a bit of string mended its strap and buckle at the back. His green-and-yellow plaid pantaloons were short and ragged round the foot, and one of his elastic-sided boots was burst over a bunion, and displayed an inch of white sock.

The other man was cleanly dressed in a blue blouse, with trousers strapped neatly over his narrow, pointed boots. On his head was a spreading beret of black velvet, which, with the cut of his clothes, would have marked the foreigner, even if his face, with the high cheek bones, cleft chin, small, slanting eyes, grey imperial and carefully waxed moustaches had not proclaimed it. He had an oddly military air as he worked away with his chisel and hammer on a group consisting of a gentleman in a pointed collar and marble trousers, and a smirking angel, who might have been asking to be led out in a quadrille, if her finger, up-pointed with an ogling air, had not disclosed the celestial ambition of the partnership.

Both of Mr. Marsh's artists took his rebuke with shouts of laughter. "On bended knee," declaimed the fellow with the wild black hair, "we crave your highness's forgiveness"; and like some loose-jointed marionette he flung himself on his knees, and held out his hands clasped in a gesture of imploration.

"Pardon! Many times, pardon, *Padrone!*" growled the soldier-like man, his little eyes glinting with amusement.

"Get up, Grimes, do! And you, Toni, go on with your work," answered Marsh petulantly. "What's all the row about? 'S'my belief you been having a reg'lar read-and-write!"

"It is him!" cried Toni, pointing his carving tool at the ruffled little man. "It is that Wilkins! He comes here this morning and say he is to be married!"

"Well, that's his business, isn't it?" objected Marsh. "It's nothing to fight about!"

"A rehearsal, Guv'nor, just a rehearsal for him," explained Grimes. "Besides d'you know who he had the impidence to say he'd marry? The Widow Macarthy!"

"*La vedova!*" chimed in Toni, fingering his iron-grey moustache.

"Her that owns the Alpine Cottage tea-gardens at Hampstead!" emphasised Grimes.

"Gracious!" exclaimed Mr. Marsh, quite startled. "But she's a person in a werry good way o' business. She's got the bees and honey all right . . . I congratulate you, Wilkins, if it's true."

"True!" roared Grimes. "Why, Guv'nor, she's simply playing with him! Think Carlotta Macarthy would marry a duck-billed miscarriage, like Wilkins?"

"Hush!" commanded Mr. Marsh. "Be respectable!"

"Why," pursued the irrepressible Grimes, "only last Saturday night she had her arms round me in the harbour——"

"Now, that'll do!" roared Wilkins, turning crimson.

"Yes, that'll do!" commanded Marsh sternly. "I want to interdooc to you gents a new . . . er . . . colleague, who joins us from Italy."

There was a sudden, dead silence. Deodato was conscious of six eyes fixed upon him, cold rather than hostile, but measuring him up and studying him. He was acutely embarrassed. "This," Mr. Marsh continued his announcement, "is Mr. Michael Angelo."

"Who?" exclaimed Grimes.

"I beg your pardon?" asked Wilkins.

"*Ritorno inaspettato!*" murmured Toni.

"Wait a minute, boys!" suggested Grimes. "The gentleman perhaps adopts the title as a sort of *nom de jerry*. Perhaps they're alooking for him in his native land, and he don't perticklerly want to be found. Am I right, sir?" and as Deodato looked at him a little bewildered he added with a bow, "I'm sure it's a privilege to work in a studio with a gent of that peeculiar and honourable description." Turning his back, he resumed his squeezing of the clay almost viciously.

Toni seemed to take his cue from Grimes; for he also after a frigid little bow turned away, and began to chip at the skyward-bound grocer again.

Mild little Wilkins murmured awkwardly, "Pleased to meet you, I'm sure, Mr. . . . er . . . er," but didn't seem to mean it, as he wrung out the wet cloth on the model he was attending to.

"Well," said Mr. Marsh, who looked rather as if he had himself been subjected to the damping process in the last few minutes, "we must find something for Mike to begin on." He took a scroll from his pocket, and read, "To Ameliar long-suffering wife and mother of sixteen olive-branches deeply lamented by her husband——" He broke off. "Have you done any letter-cutting, Mike?"

"*Lettere scolpite*? No . . ." Deodato shook his head.

"Pointing, then?" Marsh picked up the tool to illustrate with gesture.

"Yes. I have had the lessons in that."

"Good. Then I won't send you over to the letter-cutters' shed. You shall help Wilkins here to bash the rough o' that kneelin' angel when he's ready."

"I say, Guv'nor," interposed Grimes, "you a'n't reelly going to allow this myst'ry man of yours to mess up that bit o' marble, are you? Cost you thirty pun, fifteen if he spoils it."

"I shall not!" interrupted Deodato bluntly.

"I expect he'll do all right," said the easy-going Marsh.

"It's your look-out, Guv'nor," answered Grimes with a shrug. "I was only thinking of your pocket."

Mr. Marsh, after supplying Deodato with the necessary tool, left the studio, and for a while there was silence, broken at last by Grimes.

"Toni," he asked, "you must meet some rum customers over in your country, don't you?"

"Oh! I don't know," drawled Toni. "They send the worst over here, I t'ink."

"What about you, Toni, then?" hinted Wilkins in a low voice.

"Well," retorted Grimes, "whatever Toni landed in old England without, he did bring his name with him, didn't you, old chap? You called yourself plain 'Toni Baccelli,' not Julius Cæsar, nor yet Loocretia Borgia, didn't you?"

Deodato felt his hand beginning to tremble a little, but contained himself.

"New styles now in this studio," began Grimes again presently, finding his first provocations ineffective. "I reckon the dead'll come out of their graves when they see such a figure headstone as I observe bein' executed not a hundred miles from hence."

Deodato's hand shook too much for him to control his pointing-tool. He turned and faced the facetious Mr. Grimes. "Will you please, Mister, not to be saying such things? I do not like them."

"Was you pleased to be addressing me, sir?" enquired Grimes with exquisite deference.

"Yes, it is you!" Deodato's voice rang out sharply. "Please to do your work, Mister, and leave me to do mine!"

"And if I don't please, Signor . . . er . . . Signor Macaroni . . . what then?"

"Then perhaps I make you!"

"Just a moment, just a moment!" Grimes slid off his stool, and wiped his fingers on a rag. "Now, sir," he said, "not wishing by any accident to put mud in your eye, which is not according to P.R. rules, what was it you just said, sir, and would you be good enough to explain yourself, sir? Otherwise, sir . . . I may be compelled, sir . . . to teach you a different sort of language, sir!"

Deodato stared at him in bewilderment; for Grimes was dancing round him like a monkey, making his fists revolve in the air, and ducking and lifting his head with a sawing movement.

Deodato wondered if this were an English national dance.

"Come on, sir!" urged Grimes, continuing his saltatory movements, "put 'em up, sir! Don't be shy, sir! Are you at home, sir? Forgive me knocking on the door, sir!" With which words he danced in and hit Deodato a not very hard blow on the chest, to provoke him to combat.

Deodato felt a red flame rise in him which he had never experienced in the quietness of the convent or its school. As Grimes danced up once more with his fists scientifically working, he hit him hard in the face and sent him spinning down into a bucket filled with wet plaster, where he sat with one hand clutching his sodden trousers while the other painfully felt for his eye. Muffled sounds came from him, which were somehow not as ferocious as Deodato was prepared to hear.

The attitude of the other artists, however, was not equivocal. Toni flung his beret in the air and running up to Deodato embraced him on both cheeks. "*Bravo! bravissimo, giovane!*" he roared. "You have shown him an Italian knows the *boxe* as well as him!"

"Yes, Grimes, you certainly did ask for it," grinned Wilkins.

"Orl right! orl right!" groaned the defeated champion. "I b'lieve the little beggar's closed my right eye. Help me up out of this, some o' you fellers, for Evans' sake!"

His two friends pulled him to his feet, and Wilkins tried to dry the seat of his trousers with a cloth. Grimes still held one hand over his damaged eye, but the other he shot towards Deodato, calling, "Come here, come here, my boy!"

Deodato, interpreting this as a renewal of hostilities, stepped back, and snatching up a carving-chisel, threatened him with the point of it; but the other two shouted at him, "No! no! Put that

down . . . That's not fair fighting! Shake his hand! Shake hands with him! . . . He wants to be friends, don't you understand?"

"Friends?" protested Deodato all in a maze. "Why? He hit me and I knock him down!"

"All the better!" roared Grimes. "Now I begin to like you, Mike! Come on, shake hands!"

"Don't tell us you're a *quarrelsome* fellow, Mike!" said Wilkins severely. "We've never had anything of that sort in this studio yet!"

Deodato threw up his arms and burst into a shout of laughter. The next moment Toni and Grimes had caught his two hands and were whirling him round in a wild dance, while Wilkins whistled an accompaniment, and catching up a mallet, beat, as though it were a drum, upon a circular stone inscribed, "He rests in Peace."

"Yes, that's orl right,!" said Grimes at length, breaking from the *tarantella*, "but this bloody eye of mine, you know——"

"It is not bleeding, Grimes," said Deodato consolingly, "it is only black a little."

"Oh lor'," groaned the Englishman, "he doesn't understand the first word of our language! I need a good piece of raw steak to reduce this swelling——"

"You pay for it, eh?" asked Toni sardonically, returning to his work.

"Well, then a cold carving-knife."

"Ask Mother Marsh to lend you hers!" sniggered Wilkins. "Look here, Grimes, you take my advice! Climb up to that A.D. and put your eye against *her*. That'll cool it!"

"Think so?" asked Grimes ruefully, and, scrambling up the pedestal, he embraced the mature matron, who stood with one arm curled in the air, holding a sword, and rested his eye lovingly against her cheek.

"You make a lovely group! *Bellissimo!*" Toni assured him, puffing with laughter.

"How long have I got to stop here?" wailed the reluctant lover, changing his position so as to strike a cooler spot on the angel's irresponsive cheek.

"Just wait till the swelling goes down," Wilkins told him. "Give us a song in the meantime, won't you?"

"Orl right!" assented Grimes, kicking out with his burst boot

in what looked like an access of passion, and he began to chant in a throaty croak :

" My name it is Sam Hall, chimney-sweep !
My name it is Sam Hall, chimney-sweep !
My name it is Sam Hall,
I robs both great and small,
But they makes me pay for all——"

And Toni, tapping at his Guiding Angel, and Wilkins, applying himself to the clay of a Weeping Muse, responded with a hearty roar :

"D——n your eyes !"

Deodato continued his roughing with the conviction of being in a mad-house . . . but a friendly one.

(2)

At one they all trooped into dinner in Mrs. Marsh's kitchen, a leg of mutton baked in a tin, and a Dutch cheese with a red rind, which they speedily reduced to a ruin. Marsh had gone off to Highgate on some business, and Mrs. Marsh served them with a grim speechlessness that reduced them all to a champing silence. She was assisted by her daughter, dressed in a plain black bodice and skirt. For a moment Deodato did not recognise in the demure girl, with her brown hair plastered down over her temples, her expressionless face and sulky, closed mouth with the middle teeth showing on the lower lip, the half-wild creature who had run downstairs last night in her bedgown. She seemed to resent having to help to wait on the men, and did nothing to break the embarrassed silence that accompanied the clink of the cutlery.

They were all glad enough to get back to the studio to work again after the meal, and suddenly Madeline drifted into the conversation . . . Deodato felt, almost guiltily, that his thoughts must have communicated themselves to his companions. It was Grimes, however, who started the subject.

" Last time," he said, " I had a ' mouse ' like this," he pointed to his eye, now assuming an autumnal variety of hue, " no it wasn't, though, it was a lacerated boko—I forget which of you brigands tapped my claret and why—I remember Madeline took me into the

scullery, and helped put it right with a bucket of water. She's a queer piece, that gel! Strike me blind if she isn't! Looks at you most days as if she'd be glad to turn you into stone . . . like the old codger in the Uproar, Toni!"

"Ah! the *Commendatore*! Brum . . . brum . . . brum . . ." Toni hummed some bars of the statue music from "Don Juan."

"That's about the tune of it. Well, that night, believe me or believe me not——"

"I don't, Grimes," said Toni.

"Shut your trap, hurdy-gurdy man! . . . As I was telling you, we were alone in the little scullery over in the house, and it was getting on for dusk, and she was holding back my head to stop my nose bleeding. . . ."

"She ought to have shoved a cold key down your backbone."

"Do listen, Wilkins! . . . Her other hand all the time was running over my neck and chest, and she was so excited . . . like a mad woman . . . I could 'a done just what I liked with her . . . at that moment."

"Oh! Oh!" exclaimed Toni with contemptuous incredulity.

"You haven't got no right to speak like that about Miss Madeline," said Wilkins primly, "nor," he added with a burst of chivalry caused by the thought of the proprietress of the Alpine Cottage Tea Gardens, "about any woman!"

Deodato was silent, bewildered at the disturbance he felt. Grimes's brutal words had gone through him like a fire, filling his mind with images he sought vainly to expel. Meanwhile he heard the sculptor grumbling, "I don't see why we need to be mealy-mouthed about that gel. After all, everyone round here knows."

"Knows what?" demanded Toni, his mallet poised in the air.

"Oh! don't start on all that story again, Grimes!" protested Wilkins. "It's . . . it's . . . horrible . . . and let's hope it's not true!"

Grimes seized a marble anchor that stood by the wall, and heaving it along the floor with a tremendous effort, let it drop almost on Wilkins's toes. The little man jumped back with a squeak, and cried angrily, "Do be careful! You'll chip it! . . . I don't know reelly what Mr. Marsh can think of chaps like us!"

"What is it they are saying about Meess Marsh?" Deodato could hardly believe it was his own voice that had spoken.

"Well reelly, I don't think," expostulated the scandalised Wilkins, "you're entitled on your first day to ask . . . Anyway she's not Miss Marsh. Her father was an ironmonger, name of Kempthorne. He died suddenly after a short illness, and Marsh married his widder."

"A barmy thing to do!" insisted Grimes.

"Why? Kempthorne left her a nice bit, I've heard. So stop this scandal-mongering, Grimes. Else——"

"*Basta! Basta!*" interrupted Toni, with a wave of his chisel. Go on, Grimes! I never heard the story!" He pulled at his moustache with a cynical gleam in his eyes.

"Just peep out across the yard, then, Toni, and see the old man a'n't prowling about."

Toni complied, and coming back shut the door carefully. "It is all right," he said. "Now tell us, Grimes!"

"Well, how I come to know is this. I was friendly with a gel in the cigar-divan, corner of Tottenham Court Road and Percy Street, who knew another gel employed by old Mrs. Lipton, Mother Shipton they used to call her, the mid-wife in Kentish Town. Bella said . . ." he broke off tantalisingly, and affected to be modelling with strained attention.

"Well," he said after a prolonged pause, "I suppose you can guess. Bella said Mother Shipton disposed of the child for 'em."

"And the father, who was he?" demanded Toni, all agog.

"Well, the yarn they spun to Mother S. was that Madeline had been forced by a feller down by the Regent Canal there one evening—a vagabond of some sort that she never saw again."

"I heard that too," said Wilkins in a hushed voice. "It's shocking to think of. Poor little girl, poor little girl!"

Grimes sniffed. "Well, if you ask me, I don't think much forcing would a' been needed. What was she doing down by the canal in the evening, anyways?"

"A summer evening? Lots of girls goes down to pick flowers," retorted Wilkins. "I suppose the poor little thing stayed out a bit too late——"

Toni puffed out his cheeks to show his scepticism. "You are a very funny people, you English!" he announced.

"I s'pose no gel in Italy ever took a sweetheart?" said Grimes derisively.

"I don't say that. No, but these people are so religious, so holy,

always at the chapel!" He folded his hands across his breast, and cast his eyes up to heaven in inimitable mimicry of a sacred picture.

"Well," pursued Grimes, "she went away, didn't she, for about the necessary time last year? Marsh said she was staying with an aunt in the country at Highgate to get over a decline. It all fits in . . . and see how her mother treats her now, just like dirt!"

"Mr. Marsh," hazarded Deodato, "is not so cruel!"

"Ah! but you see, Mike, Marsh is o'ny her step-father, so he nacherally wouldn't feel it like as if it was his own flesh and blood."

"Oh, but it is horrible!" said Deodato suddenly with a violent shudder. For a moment he feared that he was going to be sick. Then, "Excuse a minute!" he said, and pulling open the studio door, went out into the yard to get a breath of fresh air. But the yard, too, seemed stuffy, dirty, smelly. For a few minutes he regretted the convent with acute nostalgia; he thought of the cleanliness and silence and peace of the house and the church, the purifying and uplifting of the daily Offices. Why had he sacrificed all this to come into a world so unclean and oppressive? Just now he simply dared not think of Ludovica: it seemed like dragging her into a cesspool.

Bursts of song had reached his ears while he stood struggling with himself in the little yard; and on taking his place again in the studio he found that his comrades were relieving the tedium of their work, now prolonged in the fading afternoon with the aid of large oil lamps, by joining in an endless ballad, the solo part of which was sustained by Grimes, while the other two joined in the "fol-de-rol" of the chorus. He could hardly follow the words at first; but was amazed, as he began to make them out, to find that they seemed to be a version of a famous Italian story.

"Two lov-yers' fates I'll sing," (chanted Grimes)

I'm sure you'll all bemoan her.

She was such a tender thing,

Was Miss Juliet of Verona!"

CHORUS: "With her fol de rol, fol de rol, fol de rol, day."

"O Mother, why!" quoth she,

'Did you leave me all alone-y,

A young spark has captured me,

Who came to my balcony!"

CHORUS: "With her fol de rol, fol de rol, fol de rol, day."

"Can't you fellers keep a bit quieter?" asked the voice of Marsh at the door, as they were starting about the twentieth verse. "I reelly should a' thought the sacred and painful associations of your work would a' suggested the impropriety of——"

"Guv'nor," said Grimes, swinging round on his stool. "What's the tune of Sam Cowell's 'Artful Dodger'? Don't it go like this?" He whistled.

"Not a bit *like* it!" affirmed Marsh. "Jist you listen!" Pursing up his protuberant lips, he shrilly corrected Grimes's effort, breaking off suddenly amid general laughter, "Now stop it, boys! You shouldn't lead me on! Makin' enough row we are, to break the Jenny Linders!"

"Well, but just listen to this, Guv'nor!" pleaded Grimes.

"A foreign-looking gent I see,
What's come to join our party.
He looks a decent chap, and we
Will treat him good and hearty!
With a doodledum, doodledum——"

"Well, I'm glad to find you're acting friendly, anyways," said Marsh, "though I dunno what you done to your eye, Grimes . . . Toni, is that group nearly finished?"

"One more day, *Padrone!*" answered Toni, giving the angel a familiar tap on the nose from his mallet.

"We must have it, Wednesday, you know! Grimes! I hope you haven't forgot what the vidder said about that cherub you're doing."

"No, I understand. Just an Uncle Ned and a cloud! The pore kid must get b——y tired not being able to sit down. But it's easy enough modelling."

(3)

The clock from the church-cupola near by chimed six, and Toni laid down his tool and began to unbutton his blouse. Wilkins looked at a large silver watch.

"Time, gemmen, please!" Grimes skipped off his stool, and seized a tall white hat and a cloak with a rabbit-fur collar from a peg. "Good-night, Mike!" he said. "Come to the Marybone or the Wells one night with me at half-price, will you, and we'll have a barrel-ful of oysters after." Deodato confusedly thanked him.

"Good night," said Wilkins, who had become the image of respectability in black frock-coat and vest crossed by his silver watch-chain, from which an elephant's tooth was suspended. "One Sunday soon you might come and tea with us at the Alpine Cottage. Mrs. Macarthy always glad to welcome any friend of mine," he added importantly.

"I thank you very much," said Deodato.

"Will you take a walk with me now?" asked Toni, speaking for the first time in Italian. He had shed his blouse and all look of the journeyman mason with it. He was arrayed now in a top-hat tapering towards the crown and worn with a shameless tilt, a dark-green tail-coat with high, almost leg-of-mutton, shoulders, and brown dog-skin gloves. "We can walk along Regent Street," he added, "and drink something, if it pleases you."

"Thank you, I will . . . gladly!" answered Deodato, seduced more by the sound of the Italian tongue than by anything else into prompt acceptance of the invitation.

Soon they were marching side by side up the stately pavements of Portland Place towards the spire of All Souls', pricking like a pencil-point into the gloaming. Toni's high-heeled boots rang like a General's upon the stones; with one hand he twirled his moustaches, with the other he spun his black, silver-mounted stick. From time to time as they passed the grand but sombre mansions lining each side of the broad Place he glanced at his companion in a manner that was not unkindly but made Deodato conscious of his threadbare, almost ragged, condition.

"You need some new clothes, my boy," he told him bluntly at length. "You should get the *Padrone* to advance your wages. He is a good fellow, Marsh: he would to it."

"He is not paying my wages," answered Deodato hesitatingly.

"*E vero!* Who then?"

"The . . . the person who placed me with him," replied Deodato with an awkward reserve.

Toni slowed his pace, and shot a piercing glance at him.

"You can be frank with me," he said; "we all of us belong to something or other. Is it Marianne?"

Deodato stared blankly at him. "No, no," he stammered, "it is no woman . . . no woman at all!"

Toni clapped him on the shoulder with a shout of laughter.

"Good! I see you are one of the Holy Innocents! So, you are not sent by any Society. . . . Marianne, the Carbonari, or any other? You are just a boy who comes to England to make his fortune. *È vero?*"

"Yes, my friend," replied Deodato with a sudden touch of dignity. "I come to make a career as an artist. As a sculptor."

"And you enter the studio of Marsh!" Toni hunched his shoulders with a terrific pantomime of screwed eyes and nauseated lips.

"I had to go where I could find bread," answered Deodato a little sullenly.

"No doubt, no doubt!" Toni took his arm, and piloted him forcibly but skilfully through the roaring traffic of Oxford Circus. The plate-glass windows of the shops glowed with gas-light reflected from the mirrors and gilded woodwork within. With their glimpses of rich stuffs, fine china, and splendid furniture they wore an almost magical look.

"It is easy," pursued Toni, as they marched on together down the exquisite curve of Nash's Regent Street, jewelled with lamps, "it is easy to get on with the English . . . only one must understand clearly that they are mad. . . . *Ah! che bellezza!*" he cried loudly, and paused a moment ogling with jerks of his shoulders and winks a young lady in a flower-decked bonnet who happened to glance out of her brougham window as she drove by. She did not notice him; but he strutted on his way, chuckling and preening himself as if he had driven off with her. "There are plenty of beauties, too, among the English," he condescended to inform Deodato, "but you must seek them among the *nobiltà!*"

"Ah!" objected Deodato, "but see these little girls who go past us here——"

"Milliners," said Toni scornfully, "going home from work!"

"Well, be it so. But their vivacity . . . the life in their eyes . . . their charming movements like little birds!"

Toni shrugged his shoulders. "They are better perhaps in the eyes of the artist than the women of the middle-class, like that *spaventevole* Madeline, b-r-r-r!" He shuddered. "I will take you one day to the Hyde Park. There you will see beauty—Duchesses, Marchionesses, Countesses, Baronetesses!" He waved his hand.

Deodato was silent. They were approaching the Quadrant, and

he was conscious of the continental element in the crowd. Cloaked figures in tremendous hats, like operatic bandits (which in fact they were), sallow Frenchmen with goat-beards, the members of a German band carrying their music-stands and brass instruments under their arms, jostled against the debauched-looking "Greeks" (decoys for the neighbouring gambling-houses) with their grimy, ringed hands and silk-hats seedy for all their gloss, and the violently rouged daughters of joy, patrolling with an audacious Parisian cut to their crinolines. Along the edge of the pavement were ranged rough-looking men in velveteens, exhibiting for sale poodles, retrievers and shivering puppies which they brought in and out of their immense pockets like conjuring-tricks. Deodato was struck by the gentle, bewildered eyes of these tiny creatures, exposed in the flood of wealth, fashion, vice and roguery.

Under one of the last arches of the Quadrant Toni suddenly hailed an enormously fat, clean-shaven man who came out of a cigar-shop with a cape swinging from his shoulders.

"What, Radicofani!" he cried, "you here already? The season does not begin for a month, does it?" Turning, he introduced Deodato to "the famous baritone of the Italian Opera." Signor Radicofani was both agreeable and condescending; he explained he had come early to England to get settled in before the rehearsals began, and deigned to accompany them to an oyster-shop in Leicester Square.

"And what part will you play this season, my hero?" demanded Toni of the singer as he voraciously swallowed a dozen oysters, standing by the bar.

"As many as will kill a man!" returned Signor Radicofani, mopping his lofty bald forehead in anticipation with a purple handkerchief. "In one opera I have played in the First Act a fisherman; in Act II, a brigand; in Act III, a guest at the Grand Duke's ball; and in the funeral scene, a monk. Four heavy changes, old friend, in one night! It is enough to make a man waste away . . . and then where would my voice be? . . . And then where would the Opera be—without me?—Radicofani, the *basso profondo*!"

Toni sympathised; bade him keep up his strength with stout and another half-dozen oysters; and then asked his permission to light up a long pale cigar, if it would not irritate his throat.

The singer consented with an air of martyrdom, and Toni, pointing to Deodato, told him, "You must find orders for my young friend

and myself to the gallery one night, Radico. Let him hear Opera as it should be sung. There is nothing like it at La Scala or the Fenice."

"Or San Carlo," assented Radicofani, flinging back his stout.

"No," assented Toni. "The English get the best of everything."

"How is that?" enquired Deodato.

"Because they pay for it, my friend," rejoined the *basso*. "They will pay anything on earth for what they fancy. But they have to come to us Italians," he inflated his chest, "to get it."

"I have never heard an opera," confessed Deodato, "nor indeed been inside a theatre at all."

"No?" asked Toni. "Where have you passed your life, then? . . . In Rome? Ah! they have no theatres worth anything there."

"The ballet," said Radicofani, "have to wear blue tights, since pink ones may suggest the flesh." He gave an immense, melancholy grimace. "But the Pope is not so prudish as the English," he concluded.

"What did you do in Rome?" enquired Toni, his eyes glinting with curiosity. "And why did you leave it?"

As both men seemed friendly and both were compatriots in a very strange land, Deodato was tempted to tell them at least part of the truth. "I was a friar," he said, "and I escaped from my convent."

A glum and disapproving look spread over Radicofani's infinite expanse of face. "That isn't right, my boy!" he protested. "'Once a priest, always a priest,' you know."

"But I was, at least, not a priest!" Deodato answered with a wavering smile.

"And anyhow you are talking nonsense, Radico!" said Toni.

"With Garibaldi we had . . . oh! a dozen priests who were no longer priests, and fine fighters, too!"

"You were with Garibaldi!" exclaimed Deodato, edging away from him, from mere force of habit when the dreadful name was uttered.

"I was. Do you see the devil on the wall, *Frate*?" Toni fiercely twirled his moustaches. "While he held your Rome, in '49, I helped to chase the *Napoletane* back to their kingdom with bayonets in their pantaloons. Afterwards . . . when it was clear the sword had no more to say, for the present, and that words had

come back to rule . . . I threw down my arms, for I am a soldier if required, but never a politician."

"Perhaps," said Radico nodding solemnly, "the sword will come back soon."

"What is all that?" demanded Toni. "Who dare unsheath a sword or load a musket in Italy to-day?"

"Napoleon," retorted Radico pithily. He drew his watch from its fob. "I must leave you, I have an appointment with a little English girl." He winked solemnly.

"You do not believe," persisted Toni, "that this Buonaparte will ever take up arms to free Italy instead of enslaving her?"

Radico leaned towards him mysteriously. "I know this. Louis Napoleon, when he was a young man in exile in Italy, became a Carbonaro, duly sworn and enrolled . . . and he dare not break his oath to the Society. . . . Orsini has given him a warning . . . he will not wait for another. He is only *crouching*," Radico's pantomime knocked over two small tables and a chair in the oyster shop, "*crouching* for the moment to make his spring!"

"I have heard all that before," grumbled Toni, after Radico had taken a ceremonious departure. "Napoleon is growing sleek and lazy. . . . His taste is now for hunting women, not the white-coats. There is nothing around him in the Court of the Tuileries that does not help him to forget Italy and her woes. I know the man!"

"If there were war would you fight again?" asked Deodato curiously.

"*Sicuro!* I have neither wife nor children. And you know, 'Once a soldier, always a soldier.'"

Deodato started. Toni's words came as an echo to those of the singer a few minutes before, "Once a priest, always a priest." Trying to find his own way home, after parting with Toni, he felt as perplexed in his soul as a boat without a rudder. Why had he come to England? In the hope of establishing his parentage? What an empty hope! To learn art? He groaned at the thought of Mr. Marsh's statuary. It was worse than the sugar-plum imagery of the Borgo. Ludovica was removed from him by the width of a continent and a sea. . . . Why had he brought that about? Why had he exchanged the warmth and loveliness of Italy for this black and chilly inferno, with its dirt and smuts and ceaseless, menacing roar? Had he, indeed, turned his back on the light? "Once a

priest, always a priest." Did he indeed stand condemned under that judgment?"

While he thus debated with himself he had arrived back at Oxford Circus. The shops were just putting up their shutters, and as, leaf by leaf, these cut off the lights inside, the street darkened, and the swirl of traffic in the circus, the two streams on the pavement of those hurrying home from work and those issuing forth for the night-pleasures of London, fell into dimness. The gas-lamps, burning at rare intervals, by their patches of light intensified the mystery. For a few minutes Deodato stood in the doorway of a shop, watching the throng stream past. Just in front of him a lamp shed its rays downwards in a fan of yellow light, and each passer-by, emerging from the shadow and fading into it again, had his or her face for a moment brightly defined.

And suddenly Deodato became absorbed, fascinated by these faces as they went by him, borne on the unresting river. The vulture eyes of the man of pleasure questing his game, the weariness of this working-girl, the lilting gaiety on the faces of the next two, walking arm-in-arm, the tight-lipped grimness of a business man, manager or cashier, the drawn pallor of a poor mother carrying and trying to console a too heavy baby, another baby face above the collar of a young swell, vacuously sucking the gold knob of his cane, the bearded countenance of a ragged old Jew, shuffling past like a dunghill Jeremiah, a swarm of children in tatters, half impudent, half innocent, darting in and out of the crowd round the lamp-post—to Deodato's awakened eyes the setting of all these vanished. He no longer perceived the sordidness, the tawdriness, the vulgar ostentation of the fashionable thoroughfare. Only the faces hung on the night like sculptured masks, but masks of a subtle, quivering delicacy, flesh and blood idealised rather than set in stone. He seemed to have before him a frieze of humanity in its essential passions and dreams, its tragedies and its villainies, its pitiableness and its grotesqueness, a living Whole infused by One Spirit. Each detail, he saw, was needed for the fullness of the composition, and through every line of the vision, the harsh and sinister as well as the lovely and benignant ones, pulsed the flame of Life in its ebullience, its striving after self-transcendancy, its consuming heat for ever forging and crumbling again the shapes of grandeur and of ecstasy. . . . It was an experience such as he had never before had in his life, though something like it had stirred and glimmered in

his soul at rare moments of devotion in church or meditation in his cell. But never with this radiance of inner illumination, this imperious challenge to his faculties! It was not so much a command laid on him as a necessity that sprang from his inmost nature to express all this . . . to interpret its glory! . . .

By degrees the murmur of passing voices, the shuffle of passing feet reasserted themselves in his consciousness. He was back in the glooming street again, with the current and detritus of a great city pouring by in their triviality, veiled again in their accidents, with their disfigurements, uglinesses and vulgarities cloaking the essential forms of good and evil. With a sigh he moved forward, seeking to recall the way across the circus to the monumental sculptor's establishment. Dejection had settled on him more heavily than ever. Still his confused brain echoed, as with a condemnation, to the singer's words, "Once a priest, always a priest."

CHAPTER FIVE

OLD BEAKY

(I)

ON the top slopes of Highgate Cemetery, just below the spire of the parish church, Deodato sat side by side with Mr. Marsh in the shade of a weeping willow on a morning towards the end of May, some two months after his arrival in England, and was permitted to share his employer's lunch. They had been working since early, setting a large monument in site. The paper-capped masons who had done the transport and were now setting it in place on the bearer stones with rollers, ropes and sheer-legs, under Marsh's direction, were at this moment taking their own food out of their red handkerchiefs in a quiet corner near the stone circle of Egyptian catacombs, crowned by a superb, funereal yew-tree, which has been hollowed out of the summit of the hill where it overlooks London.

Deodato's seat beside his employer, and the privilege of sharing his meal from a wicker basket lined with old sheets of the *Police Gazette*, were symbolic of the relations of confidence that had grown up between them in the short time Deodato had been an inmate of the studio. The monumental sculptor had quite evidently fallen under the spell of "Mr. Michael Angelo." He could not understand and he sternly prohibited the individual note that the new recruit could not keep out of the pieces of modelling on which he was occasionally allowed to try his ability. On the other hand he greatly admired the dexterity and quickness Deodato had shown in picking up the more formal elements of the work, in which he had received but rudimentary instruction in Italy. No one more skilful than he in building up a useful armature for a large figure, no one more accurate now with the pointing-tool.

But more than his professional usefulness Mr. Marsh valued Deodato's companionableness—much enhanced by the intelligent speed with which his English had improved. Although Marsh had inevitably made contacts with Italian artists in the course of his

business career he had never before had intimate experience of the sympathy and natural graciousness of the Italian character ; and if he had read a deeper attachment into Deodato's national endowment of courtesy than the boy could have endorsed, it was a happy self-deception for which Deodato bore no guilt. Marsh found in him the attractiveness of a brilliant child, ever willing to listen with a smile to his gossip and his philosophy, and apt to interject comments which to his master had the charm of originality. Something exotic and stimulating, Marsh dimly realised, had come into his hum-drum life, which had hitherto known little relief but the beer-mug and the pink glamour of his favourite crime-sheet.

The other artists in the studio naturally showed small relish for the too patent favouritism their "guv'nor" showed the raw hand. They considered that he gave Deodato work to do for which he had not proved his fitness, and they resented his being so often chosen to accompany Marsh to the cemeteries as his assistant when there were plans or measurements to be made, or headstones or statues to be set in position. Grimes, indeed, was too flighty to nurse permanent resentments, and seldom indulged more than a sardonic phrase or two ; and Wilkins was too mild to give much rein to his inward dissatisfaction. Toni was the most outspoken in his jealousy, exchanging scowls and taunts for his first movement towards friendliness. But all three remembered how the newcomer had hit back at Grimes the day of his arrival ; and once when Toni had exceeded bounds in the bitterness of his envy he had seen a light in the young stranger's eye which he, and he alone in the studio, knew how to interpret. His eye had wandered, as if involuntarily, to a sharp cutter lying on a table near by, and he had paused to stroke his moustache, not fearfully, but thoughtfully.

But more directly hostile than any of the three men was Mrs. Marsh. She had never been able to abide the Italian boy from the first Sunday of his stay, when he had dared to go out of her respectable house straight to the popish Mass in the Warwick Street Chapel. From that time she had found nothing good in him—his politeness and his indifference, his dreaminess and his energy, his good nature and his rare fits of passion were all equally disagreeable to her. To Deodato she attributed everything that went wrong about the house, from the spilling of milk on the kitchen stones to the discovery of a pellet of dirt on the carpet of the parlour. Moreover, as she remarked Marsh's more and more open display of affection for

"Mike", she began to eye the youth with a new expression, half-questioning, half-threatening, which a more worldly-wise creature than Deodato would have taken for a signal of warning, and a very sinister signal too.

He, however, revolted by the sheer ugliness of the woman, paid as little attention as he could to Mrs. Marsh, and more than he should to the mystery of her daughter Madeline.

It had been on that very first Sunday when he had lost for ever the favour of the mother that he had received a fresh impression of the daughter. It was after the midday dinner. Mrs. Marsh had retreated to the mysterious upper part of the house, to which Deodato felt he would never be allowed to penetrate, to lie down, and Marsh had fallen into a doze in the wicker-chair in the kitchen, his lurid Sunday newspaper fallen to his feet. Deodato, sitting bored opposite him, and wondering if British sabbatical propriety allowed him to escape, had suddenly been startled by the sound of sobbing. Rising quietly to his feet, while Marsh grunted and gulped in his slumber, he had crept out into the passage leading to the front-door.

As he had thought, the sound came from the top of the stairs. Deodato stood at their foot peering upwards into the twilight, and made out Madeline's indistinct form coiled down on the highest step, with her crinoline skirts crushed about her, in the lithe abandonment that characterised all her movements. She was sobbing with a hurried breath that had a hysterical catch in it, not, seemingly, the relief of a troubled spirit, or the breakdown of an overtaxed one. The quick, querulous sobs had a sort of demand in them, as if she who uttered them was bitterly, passionately reproaching Fate, beating like a child on the closed doors of Destiny.

As Deodato stood staring rather stupidly at the huddle of shadowy draperies, she moved, and he saw the glimmer of her face, the whites of her eyes flashing. She stopped sobbing in the middle of a breath, and seemed to watch him as she crouched. He stood still, not knowing what to say.

Suddenly a hoarse whisper startled him. "What are you watchin' me for? What are you follerin' me about for? Why do you hunt me like this?"

He was aghast at the venom of her tone. "But, Signorina," he whispered back, "I am not wanting to trouble you at all. I was afraid you might be ill . . . or . . . or some thing."

"I don't want you!" she shot back. "D'you hear? I don't want you! Go away!"

"Excuse! I ask pardon!" he muttered, descending the two or three steps of the stair he had mounted. As he did so he heard a frantic rustle of skirts, and glancing up again for a second, found that Madeline had disappeared.

For a few minutes he had stood alone in the gloomy, yellow passage, jarred and perplexed. He felt the prison-like character of the house more oppressively than ever, and at the same time a queer, disturbing pity stole over him. He felt ashamed of the repulsion he had experienced for Madeline when Grimes had brutally given his version of her calamity in the studio. Why should he avert his eyes from her because she had been outraged? Why feel disgust with the victim instead of the offender? . . . And for nearly an hour he had been unable to subdue the tumult within himself. . . .

(2)

Mr. Marsh amicably handed him a slice of bread and cheese, recalling him from vague ruminations to the dim vision of London spread in the distance below them.

"Smoky city!" he thought as he munched, and remembered that Grimes sometimes referred to it simply as "the Smoke." Even on this sunny day it was draped in smoke-curtains, continuously re-woven from the mouths of factory-chimneys that thrust like black rods among the church-spires and towers. Enormous in expanse seemed to Deodato's eyes the grey mass lying beneath its sullied pall, which thinned by degrees to unveil the distant azure of the Surrey hills and, overhead, the sparkling blue that canopied Hampstead and Highgate villages. St. Paul's dome swelled phantasmal, drowned in the thickness of the eastern smoke; but elsewhere square shafts of sunlight cut in places through the fainter coils, and gleamed here on a white Regency cornice, there on an arched glass roof, and there again on the new Gothic pinnacles of Westminster. Deodato, however, saw with his mental eye the smuts from the chimneys, heard in his mind the roaring of the crowded streets, and even at this distance felt a little of that dread of the ravening dragon, London, which had assailed him when he

was first drawn into its fangs. He sighed, with his long chin cupped in his hands.

"Have a last swig of the pig's ear and cheer up!" said Mr. Marsh hospitably, holding out the bottle. "What was you thinking of?"

"Nothing good, *Padrone*! . . . Fancies only!"

"A-a-ah!" Mr. Marsh deprecated fancy with a shake of his head. "Shall I tell you what I was thinking of?"

"Do, please!"

"It came back to me, looking at this old sheet of the *Police Gazette* what Mrs. M. wrapped the beef sandwiches in . . . not half bad they wasn't either. I was thinkin' how odd it is that nothing in the nature of crime ever seems to come *my* way like," his voice sounded quite querulous; "and then I remembered all of a sudden that it was nigh to this werry spot that I ackshually saw an attempt at assassination years ago. Yes, here in these peaceful and hallowed presinks . . . and in broad daylight too. Leastvays, it might a' been a-getting on towards dusk, but still plenty of light, you know, and the keeper down in his cottage yonder by the Gates, you could see his fire a'flickerin' through the blinds, and it would a' been easy enough to call him, I should a' supposed. . . . And still it was an attempt at assassination, I'll take my Gospel. . . . Vy, at this blessed minnit, we're sittin' not a hundred yards from where I first saw the little French gentleman comin' towards me!"

"What French gentleman was it, *Padrone*?" asked Deodato, interested by these words.

"I'll start at the beginning like," said Marsh. "It was in Febewerry, 'bout eleven years ago now, I should make it. It had been a bright day, though mortal cold, and I was standing on the path behind you there, having just measured two graves for monniments, all by myself. It was turnin' dusk, as I said, not dark yet but sort of shiverin' on the turn—and the turn comes quick in Febewerry. Suddenly I hears a step coming quickly . . . crunch . . . crunch . . . like that, along the path from the Gates below. It was a short, little fellow with a waist . . . rig'lar Froggie, you c'd see at vunce. They're all cast from the same mould these days, a'n't they? Long moustachers, little bit o' beard here," Mr. Marsh plucked at his chin. "All the same design . . . and always makin' trouble everywheres, so everyone says. My little friend had the rigilation moustaches and beard like the rest of 'em, and a great,

beaky nose. What a nose! His little legs was movin' like clock-work, like as if they wanted terribly to run, but had made a bet they wouldn't. Still he gets over the ground in double time, and stoppin' oppersite me, 'Are you, sare,' he asks, speakin' breathless and dry like, 'Are you the guardian of the place?' Queer vay to put it, wasn't it? that's what makes me remember so vell. 'Are you the guardian o' the donkey-race?' says he, foreign-like and rumbling in his voice. 'No, sir,' I tells him, 'I'm on'y a contractor. What can I do for you?'

"'Do for me?' he answers. 'Place me somevheres, I beg of you, where I cannot be seen. In short, hide me, for I am in great dangaire . . . hide me anyvheres, but *queek*,' and he adds somethin' about the dew, vich I understand is a French swear-word; maybe you know it?

"'Vell, sir,' I tells him, 'this is werry odd,' and then I stops, for I was lookin' at his face, and I c'd see it was green as old Stilton, and great drops a-hangin' on his cheeks above his moustachers, and such a look in his mincepies . . . kind o' glazed like, that I c'd see he was in mortual terror. And it comes into my mind of a sudden as I had in my pocket the key of one o' them Egyptian waults over there, vich I'd been booked to do some repairs in it . . . I dessay I could pick out vich one it was now if I tried. 'Vell, sir,' I says, 'if you're in any pertickler trouble, and jist want to lie low a few minnits, you foller me and step in here,' and I takes him along the passage there into the circle, unlocks the doors of the wault and lets him peep in. 'Good!' says he, 'I t'ank you. If any one,' he says, 'passes, and asks if you have seen me, you will say you have seen nobody . . . you understand? *nobody*! . . . That is my weesh,' says he, talkin' for all the world as if I was his servant and he my lath-and-plaster. Still, he had a vay with him, kind o' courteous like, that you couldn't say no to him. And so I locks him in the tomb and gets back to my measurin'."

"How very strange," murmured Deodato. "I, too, once hid a man in a burying-place to hide him. In the catacombs at Rome."

"Did you reelly, Mike? A'n't the world a small place? Vell, to come back to my tale. 'Bout ten minutes arter I'd shut him up safe, along comes three fellers from the d'rection of the Gates, foreign-carved too, walkin' hard, and lookin' left and right as they comes. 'Ah! my fine gents, thinks I, 'so it's you what are arter old Beaky, are you . . . I wonder why.' And I begins to feel a

bit frightened myself, specially vhen they stops and looks me over . . . and one of them crosses over to me, a hard-lookin' bushel o' coke he was, and no mistake, strong as a' ox and vith a big bush of a black beard. 'Sare!' says he, 'did you see anyone pass this vay?' speakin' me quite perlite in English. 'No one has passed me this last half-hour,' I tells him. 'What sort o' person might you be lookin' for,' I says, to lead him on, same as the detective perlice would a' done. 'What sort o' person?' I says lookin' straight up into the sky to show my indifference. But he sorter sees through that, 'werry cunnin' feller I c'd tell he was,—and he answers me pat, 'It was a lady in a black seal-skin jacket. But you say no one at all has passed?' 'Not a soul has passed on my honour,' I answers—vich I could say, for old Beaky hadn't passed at all; he'd *stayed*. Vell at that, they looks at one another all round, and shrugs their shoulders, vich you can't stop furriners doin', I s'pose; and off they marches right past the tomb vhere old Beaky was hidin', and winds theirselves up and away round the curve up there.

"I waits about ten minnits, and as they're vell out o' sight I goes for to unlock my little gentleman. 'I t'ank you,' says he, 'but viz your permission I vill stay for half an hour.'

"'But I wants to git home to my tea!' I tells him.

"'Zat vill be quite all right,' he answers, nodding at me in that vay of his you somehow didn't feel you could resist. So I leaves him there about another quarter of an hour, and hangs about and sees nobody; arter vich I goes back and tells him 'The coast is quite clear now, Mossoo,' (calling him 'Mossoo' jist to show him I'd penetrated his secret.) 'You can come out now, Mossoo, safe as houses,' I says, 'Besides vich they'll be closin' the simmetry in another few minnits,' I says.

"Out he comes on his little legs, vith his cane in his hand, all smart and dapper, you'd a sworn he'd been passin' a quiet arternoon in a pleasant summer-house, the vay he looked. I couldn't believe for a minnit it was him I'd seen all green vith fear. 'You must a' found it tedious like,' I says, 'waitin' all that time alone in the dark in there.' 'Oh, no, I assure you,' he answers me, rolling one o' them there cigarettes in his fingers werry neatly, 'I had plenty to occupy me.' 'Indeed, Mossoo,' I asks him, 'and what might that a' been?' 'Thinkin',' he says. 'I alwiz think best alone . . . in the dark.' Queer thing to say, wasn't it? 'To whom am I indebted for my security, please?' he asks next; so I gives him my name and

address and perfession . . . I couldn't not a' done, if I'd wanted to ever so . . . and he says with a slow sort of smile 'I fear, Mr. Marsh, you have perhaps lost the commission to make my tomb . . . through your own kindness.' 'Not at all, Mossoo,' I says, 'let's hope it's a pleasure o'ny tempr'ily deferred.' At vich he smiles in his glum vay again, staring at me."

"Do you believe," asked Deodato, smiling, "that those men were truly assassins, as you say, or were they just visitors to the cemetery, looking indeed for a lady in a fur coat?"

"I've often wondered," confessed Marsh. "But, you know Lunnon's sich a werry queer place to be in . . . and old Beaky was such a werry queer sort o' man. The next thing he says to me is, 'I call myself Charles. Will you remember, "Mossoo Charles," and I will do myself the honour of paying a visit to you to express my gratitooode to you in a better form than I can at this moment. . . . Now,' says Mossoo Charles, 'the air in this place is by no means healthy for me. Will you be so good, Mossoo Marsh, as to go to the Gates and find me a cab . . . ' Vell, you may think vy should I run errands for him? But it was his vay, you see; you just couldn't say no. I didn't believe as I should find a cab for him right up here. But sometimes you see one vaitin' by the Gates, so I goes down to look. There a'n't one, and ven I goes back to tell him, there a'n't no Mossoo Charles at all!"

"Vanished?" enquired Deodato, incredulous.

"Cut his lucky, clean as a whistle! Out by the little Gate at the top yonder, I s'pose. Anyvay he'd gone vithout a word and might a' lef' me vith a cab-man on my hands. Not quite fair, eh? A tricky thing to do. I thought I'd seen the last of him . . . But, wait! it wasn't, not by a long chalk. 'Bout a week arter what I been telling you, close on twelve at night, I was sitting up alone reading the *Police Gazette*, when there comes a quiet, sort o' sly, *rat-tat-tat-tat* on the front door. Bit gashly it sounded, you know, at that time o' night, and me all alone down there, and just finished readin' somethin' or other fit to lift your Barnet to the ceiling. But I goes to the door, and there stands Mossoo Charles, waisted frock-coat, shiny titfer on his head, lavender gloves, gold-headed cane, just his same self. 'I hope, Mossoo Marsh,' says he in that slow, rumbling kind of voice of his, 'I do not intrude at zis late hour; I weeshed to express my t'anks to you in a more tangible fashion' . . . That was the vay he always talked," chuckled Marsh, "slow

and pompous-like and big words you couldn't hardly umble-cum-stumble; 'In a tangible fashion' says he. And no sooner had I taken him with many apolligies into the kitchen—I dursen't take him into the parlour; it had been a muddy day and there'd been one dun-cow about the carpet already; no sooner were we in the kitchen than he takes off a ring . . . yes, b'lieve me, a reel di'mond ring he was wearin' outside his glove—furrin trick that, too!—and says 'I beg you to accept of this ring, as a token of my gratioode for the service you have done me, and perhaps many others, by saving my life in Highgate cemetery.' Of course, I tells him, I couldn't think of it; but he answers as if there were no sort o' question about it. 'Oh, yes, it will give me mooch pleasure, Mossoo Marsh. Put it on your fingaire.' But I makes him see I didn't like the idea, and at last gits him to excuse me. He seemed werry surprised I didn't want nothink.

"Vell, arter that, as you'll umble-cum-stumble, I couldn't do less than ask him will he take a mug o' life's a wale vith me? He says most perlutely he will, and sits down in the kitchen talkin.' He wouldn't smoke a pipe . . . but goes on rolling of those cigarettes of his and talking . . . talking . . . I niver knew sich a man for greens-and-pork in all my days! I didn' listen to half of it . . . what was the use of a Froggie . . . a Frenchman . . . tryin' to tell me about things he could never understand the first word of . . . Always tryin' to pick a man's brains, he was . . . I remember that first night, blessed if he didn't want know all about interments . . . and wan't it insanit'ry to bury folk in city churchyards and near wells and pumps in towns . . . and who owned the simmeteries outside London . . . and vy didn't the Government buy 'em all up, if you please, and make a green belt round London vith parks and play-grounds for the children in between . . . Mos' mad ideas he had on all subjects, had old Beaky. 'You'll excuse me,' I asked 'im, 'but pray who's goin' to find the *money* for all this?' 'The nashun' says he quite coolly, puffing out a ring o' cigarette smoke; you'd as thought one was as easy as the other to him! 'Nothink is so important to the nashun,' says he, 'as public saloobrity. Compared vith that, what does money matter? Besides there is always money to be had, if you know where to look for it. A man of State, Mossoo Marsh, isn't stopped by want of money.'

"'Vell, you'll excuse me remarkin' on it, Mossoo,' I tells him, 'but

it appears to me that if you had your own vay (vich God forbid, I says to myself), nearly everythink would be turned upside down.' 'Ah! Mossoo Marsh,' he answers, 'it is sometimes necessaire to turn everyt'ing upside down, so,' and he waggles his hands, 'in order to build it all up again—different.' I can see him when he said that, Mike, as well as I can see you now, leaning back in that wicker armchair of mine (it was new then), with his little legs crossed in front of him, and his little toes shining, and his thumbs turnin' over and over . . . sich a comical little bushel o' coke he was. 'And if anyone obstrucks the public good,' he says, 'they must . . . go,' he says; and when he says that his eyes; reemarkable eyes they was, sometimes blue, sometimes grey, sometimes bright and sometimes cloudy; but when he says, 'They must . . . go!' like that, they seemed to turn in to look at each other, and he himself, if you know what I mean, didn't seem to be there behind 'em any more. It was," Mr. Marsh panted with the effort of self-expression, "it was as if he had blown out the light in 'em, to hide himself . . . And reelly, d'you know," added Mr. Marsh, throwing crumbs to a sparrow hopping on the path with little, dry rustlings, "though it sounds a habsurd thing to say of a little beaky Froggie . . . with a waist . . . a man might a' felt frightened the vay he looked. . . . jist for a moment."

Deodato could not help laughing outright. With an Italian's quick suspicion, he was thinking that Marsh had been the victim of a mystification. It would be a characteristically French trick—*la blague* he had heard them call it; and he had even in his cloistered life heard rumours of the pranks the artists of the Ecole de Rome played on one another and on strangers. He strongly suspected that the famous ring, if accepted, would have turned out to be cut glass.

Unless indeed the poor *Padrone* had concocted most of the tale out of his own starved imagination. It would be like him to ornament in this way with unconscious fiction some uneventful meeting with a chattering French refugee, perhaps half-crazy from persecution and grateful for a listener. It would be quite enough to start Marsh. Poor M. Charles would become a Man of Mystery; a group of inoffensive visitors to the cemetery would become a band of conspirators—especially as one of them was stamped with the sinister sign of a black beard! Unhappy *Padrone*! From the world of reality, a world of mercenary tombs, cheese-paring customers, disrespectful

workmen, street boys who shouted ribald things after him from the alleys of Tottenham Court Road, a tyrant of a wife and . . . such a strange, disturbing daughter, he escaped into the world of his dreams, inspired by the *Police Gazette*, a universe of thrills and hair-raising possibilities built up against the sombre background of that London yonder. In this world Mr. Marsh was no longer a quarry but a pursuer, no longer laughed at but feared. It was his compensation to believe that in him a grand and subtle chief of police had been lost to society. Yet there never breathed any man, Deodato was convinced, less capable of detecting a crime if one should come within the orbit of his experience, or one less able, if a criminal were to shake him by the hand, to realise what Fortune had sent him. Why, he did not even know the truth about the horrible thing—whatever it was—that had befallen his own step-daughter. Her distraught condition brought him no inkling of the verity; he was as helpless as a sheep in face of it. His shrewdness began and ended in his business hours. The mother . . . she perhaps knew more . . . a formidable figure, truly . . . worse than her malignance towards him, Deodato, were her pallid eyes, her putty blob of a nose. . . .

"I'll tell you the nex' time I saw old Beaky." Marsh's voice pierced through his reverie. Evidently the *Padrone* was in no hurry to resume work. "You'd never guess. It was at the time of the Chartist menace," he mouthed the phrase with relish. "I s'pose that means noth'n to *you*. The Chartists, my boy, are like them Coke-an'-Carbon fellers they tell of in your country. Revolutionaries out to burn, destroy and abolish everythink! I'm no politician, but these here Chartists are too bad. In '48, that was the year, now I come to think of it, they arranged a great assembly and march upon Lunnon, to burn and pillage it, not a doubt—if the perlice hadn't had the bright idea o' suspending traffic over Vestminster and London Bridges. Everyvun was frightened o' these blood-thirsty villains, and no wonder! They enrolled thousands o' special slops, constables, that is . . . 'guards' you always call 'em . . . you do make me laugh, Mike . . . as if it was trains . . . ! and we was all ready for the worst. Vell, I was crossing Belgrave Square the werry morning all London was quaking in its shoes . . . for y'see, my business and the undertaker's must go on, whatever happens . . . and I'd been taking an order from a noble client in that highly aristocratic neighbourhood, when I sees one o'

these here specials a-walkin' towards me, smokin' a cigarette, which was forbidden, and swinging his truncheon as if he'd been a copper all his life. It was old Beaky! Would you believe it? 'Vy, Mosssoo Charles,' I says to him, 'I never thought I'd a seen you wearing that badge on your sleeve!' 'Vy not, Mosssoo Marsh?' says he. He was always perlite, my little Froggie, always ready to talk, and always seemed to have all the time in the world to do it in. 'Vy not?' says he. 'Society must be protected,' says he; 'anarchy must be put down or vhere's your progress or reform?' and he flourishes his little truncheon quite wiciously. 'You take care with that lethal weapon of yours, Mosssoo Charles,' says I, jokin' like, 'or you may do somebody a harm afore you've finished.' 'Believe me, Mosssoo Marsh,' he answers, stroking his long moustaches, and with that funny 'not at home' look creeping into his eyes, vich I've told you I didn't half like; 'believe me,' he repeats in a sort o' distant, rumbling voice, 'I'd use somethink stronger nor sticks if it rested with me to deal with these *mutes* . . . !' I thought he'd gone mad for a minnit, for I hadn't any *mutes* with me, you know."

"*Emeutes*, riots?" suggested Deodato. "Do you know, *Padrone*, I am wondering whether Monsieur Charles was not perhaps a foreign police agent?"

"Riots was what he meant, so it turned out. However did you guess it, Mike? But I don't think old Beaky was a mere copper all the same. I somehow don't see him as jist that. Still it's funny you should get the idea, for I'm a goin' to tell you somethink that proves he was as good as a detective anyvays.

"He come four or five times more to my house to talk . . . and always the same stuff . . . how to get rid of pauperism . . . how to clean up and rebuild the big cities . . . how to organise the labouring man—they was his words—to get the fair reward of his toil . . . oh! yes and there was another comical bee in his bonnet old Beaky had . . . he called it, let me see, yes, the freedom of the peoples . . . Eyetalians . . . Poles . . .

"Italians, really?" asked Deodato with interest.

"I'm sure. Hungarians, too, I think, yes, and Irish—would you believe sich insanity? I kep' on telling him I don't take no interest in politics at all. 'I shouldn't hardly know our own gracious little Queen if I saw her,' I says, 'and as for your furrin' Princes and peoples and all that upset, I can't umble-cum-stumble it at all.

... So, you see, you're wasting your wallyble time talking politics to *me*.' 'Not at all, Mosssoo Marsh,' says he, cool as a cowcumber, 'you are the man who mattaires, the voice of the millions . . . The ruler would be very foolish to neglect *you*.' 'Thanks for the compliment, Mosssoo,' says I . . . and off he goes meanderin' again . . . a perfect cure he was . . . the most woolly-headed, impracticable——'

"But did you not say he was as clever as an *agente di polizia*?"

"Ah! that was the funny part of it. We were havin' a lot o' trouble jist at that time, someone writing Mrs. Marsh a lot o' these 'nonymous letters . . . 'orrid things . . . drivin' her and me fair off our lumps o' lead! Mosssoo comes in one night, and sees I'm troubled . . . I dunno how . . . for I never said a word about it. He persuades me to tell him what's the trouble; asks to see the 'nonymous letters, and then any writin' I had from the fellers employed at the time in the studio. In two days he comes back, and says 'I t'ink I have found your man!' and shows me which of 'em *must* a' written the letters . . . in a disguised hand, but old Beaky had seen through it. I'd never have had the patience to work it all out the way he had done. 'Reelly,' I says to him 'you work in the dark like a mole.' 'It is nothing, Mosssoo Marsh,' he answers, 'nothing in the world. I amuse myself with puzzles. Zis has taken the place of the cards for an evening or two.' Ah!" Mr. Marsh became suddenly grave. "I wish old Beaky had been in England when poor Maddy's troubles happened. He would a' found out the truth for us . . . and I somehow wouldn't a' minded trustin' him with our fam'ly affairs. He was queer was old Beaky, but he was werry likeable . . . in some ways."

"He went away, then?" enquired Deodato.

"Back to his own land, I b'lieve. I can't remember when . . . 'bout ten years past, I reckon. He come to say good-bye to me, most perlately; same time o' night as always. 'Mosssoo Marsh,' he says, 'my star is calling and I must say good-bye to you' (I had heard from some vun or other as there was upsets on the contiong just then), '*Aury-vaury*, then Mosssoo Charles,' I says in his own langwidge. 'Who knows?' he answers, with his eyes all dull and dreamy-like. 'But if I am alive zis day to follow my Destiny, it is to you I owe it and I cannot forget that. Now if you are in trouble or dangaire at any time, Mosssoo Marsh' he goes on, 'for there is Revolution coming everywhere, write to that address in

Paris,' and he gives me a bit o' paper written on with the name of some bank over there . . . I got it put away still."

"And did you ever write, *Padrone*?"

"What hever for, my boy? I've had no troubles, leastvays," he sighed, "none as old Beaky could a' helped me out of—from Paris. I've never needed money badly, if that's what you mean; and it's my belief, if I had, old Beaky would a' been the last man able to help. For smart though he was always dressed . . . in his furrin style, o' course . . . there was somethink about him made me feel he hadn't too much o' the bees to spare . . . I wonder what he's doin' now, pore old Beaky? Wanderin' about Paris, I s'pose, same as he used to wander about London. He never seemed to have anything useful to do *here*, so I don't s'pose he has anything useful to do *there* . . . Vell, we must be getting along you know, and finishing vith that job."

As they walked back along the path, to rejoin the workmen who were sitting waiting for them, Mr. Marsh led Deodato aside and took him up the passage leading to the circle of catacombs. Before one of these with its mock Egyptian pillars he stopped and pointed. "That was the werry place!" he said. "That was the place I locked old Beaky in. Funny, wouldn't it a' been, if I'd gone away and forgotten all about him? As I never did undertake them repairs, and to my knowledge none have been done and nobody's been buried inside there from that day to this, vy he might a' been there still!" Mr. Marsh laughed noisily at his humour. "I wonder," he added, "if it would a' made any diff'rence to anybody if I'd never let him out at all?"

HAMPSTEAD HEATH

(I)

SUMMER had really come at last to London; there was no more doubt about it. For some weeks past it had been heralded through the invasion of the grimy brown and grey streets by flower-sellers from the adjacent fields, rush-bearers offering in a chant to mend chairs, ragged groundsel vendors, women hawking paper ornaments for summer fireplaces, and, brightly painted as pageants, gipsy vans laden with brooms, brushes and pans. A momentary rusticity overflowed the frowning and preoccupied city, giving it almost a village atmosphere. Omnibus cads, taking the money on their round perches over the door, exchanged compliments instead of threats with hansom-cab drivers, and the pavements were flecked with white hats and white trousers.

Beyond the blessed relief caused by the cessation of the cutting winds, the change of seasons brought little cheer to Deodato. Materially he was better off, the Attorney Greeves's grudging allowance having been soon exchanged for wages (generous according to the standards of the day) paid him direct by Mr. Marsh. He had been able to buy clothes, and had even money in his pocket to spend on entertainment—if he had known where to go for it. But an evening spent with Grimes at the "Judge and Jury" show, mimic trials of divorce cases held in a cellar off the Strand, had left him with small taste for English ideas of amusement.

He took to passing his hours when work was done in long, lonely rambles round the Outer Circle of the Regent's Park in the gloaming; admiring the houses of the wealthy, rising in domed and pillared terraces behind the noble trees, and so carefully watched by the top-hatted guardians of property; listening with a longing ache in his heart to the cries of the exotic birds down by the water-side in the Zoological Society's Gardens. One evening, however, he was set upon by a couple of garotters in the lonely stretch of

the canal bank near Gloucester Gate, within ear-shot, almost, of splendid Cumberland Terrace, and only saved by the lucky appearance of a patrolling Park Keeper. After that (though Mr. Marsh insincerely swore that he envied him the experience with all his heart) he abandoned even these strolls in the Park.

Ennui began to wear him down—the necessity of assisting all day to produce the hideous monuments by which his employer lived; the obligation of listening most nights to Marsh's cheerful prattle about dismembered corpses, deflowered virgins, hangings and floggings; the almost complete lack of any other society, for neither Mrs. Marsh nor her daughter, who continued to wander about the house like a resentful banshee, showed the least desire to make him feel at home.

Mrs. Marsh, indeed, was another to whom summer brought no gaiety. She wore a lighter, white cap on her grizzled hair, but otherwise made no change in her dress, going about still in the same number of crackling petticoats, the same maroon-coloured crinoline with its five bands of black velvet edging. She did not even pay tribute to the season by opening her windows for any longer time than the usual half-hour's ventilation in the morning; and the dwellers in her house sweltered in its airlessness, and were suffocated by the smell of muslin and furniture polish.

Deodato was fully aware that he made no advance in her favours. Indeed, the more the husband showed him affection the more he appeared to recede from the good graces of the wife. Her enveloping eyes seemed now to be weighing him, whenever she looked at him, with a cold and hostile suspicion. One day when he happened to be left alone with her in the house, she put him through a searching catechism in the kitchen about his birth and antecedents. It was hard to parry her questions; her eyes, as she sat upright confronting him on a hard windsor chair, with her fat fingers tapping her elbows, were so mesmeric and so provocatively sceptical of his replies. One point in this cross-examination which he could not understand very well was her insistence that he must have known Mr. Marsh before their meeting in Mr. Greeves's office; that he had not been brought into the studio simply on the attorney's recommendation, but must have had some previous relations with the monumental sculptor to justify his being taken so suddenly into this peculiar and exclusive business. Again and again she asked him his exact age, and when she thought she had caught him

out in an inconsistency about the precise date, her eyes gleamed with triumph. When he tried to explain the confusion, she dared him to tell her that he had never seen England before the spring of this year . . . Oh, no! He knew far too much about England and the English language for her to believe that story! She would like to know where he really was born . . . it would be a curious story, she didn't doubt . . . and some people who had the best right to know would learn then (she sighed) how sinfully they had been deceived.

Deodato was bewildered at her vehemence, and thankful when she switched the conversation on to his religious errors, for he continued irregularly to go to Mass, finding an alleviation of his homesickness in the little bit of Italy that the Catholic chapel presented to him. But he found it equally impossible to defend himself here. He simply could not comprehend her Biblical literalism, or her challenge to him to prove that good works were in any way needed to ensure the salvation of "the Elect"; and the debate broke off with her sweeping out of the kitchen crying, "Nehushtan! Nehushtan!"

Deodato, clutching the tangles of hair above his temples, wondered if they had both lost their reason, or if not, which of them was insane. He grew thin and haggard, not from the starvation he had feared when he first came to London, but from repulsion from the food cooked by her hands, from the increasing sense of imprisonment, from hopelessness about his future, from the desolating conviction—against which he could no longer fight—that he would never again set eyes on Ludovica, on the vision that had sent him forth on the adventure at present so grimly frustrated. He had written to her at Turin, returning the amount of the money she had lent him; but had received no answer to that or to a second letter of inquiry, and was in despair about this also. Her figure seemed to dwindle daily, as if receding further and further down an unending vista; now he tried not to think of her at all, since pain and the gnawing of fettered helplessness were the only fruit of it.

(2)

Sometimes on sunny mornings for an hour or so after waking he would have a reaction to cheerfulness and to a hope of he knew

not what deliverance. His youthful organism could not be prevented from making some such effort at self-liberation from the burden that was wearing it down. He knew a momentary exhilaration of this kind one morning in July, when he woke in the studio to a gaiety of sunshine that seemed to give a faint flavour of expressiveness even to the blockish statues ranged round his palliasse. He went singing out to the pump in the backyard to draw his washing-water under a sky almost as deep (he thought) as that of Rome, against which the dome of the Colosseum was outlined amid the Park foliage. Returning to the studio he stood in his trousers, with his lean body naked to the waist and the little embroidered square of the scapular showing on it, splashing his head and neck from the bucket. Without warning the studio door flew open, and a fluttering step entered behind his back.

A tremulous exclamation followed, and turning sharply with his towel in his hands, Deodato was startled to see Madeline standing just inside the door staring at him. "I beg your pardon," she said in her hurried, husky whisper, "Father sent me to fetch his pipe. I had no idea you was still——"

"It is alright, Signorina." Deodato smiled innocently. "I will find the pipe for you. I know very well where Mr. Marsh left it yesterday——"

"Oh! but I couldn't——" A pink flush crept into her face, enlivening it as if a painter's brush had touched the black and white rudiments of a sketch into meaning. "I can't stop, not really!" She turned with one of her fluid movements, feeling for the catch of the door.

"But why not, Signorina?" Deodato was puzzled.

She turned swiftly round, with her back against the door. He looked at her amazed. She was actually smiling! Smiling mischievously! And her eyes had changed from lack-lustre, inky pools to a black brilliance. "You *are* forward, a'n't you?" she said in a low tone, firmer than her usual voice, and threw back her head in a noiseless laugh.

"Forward?" repeated Deodato with the furrow in his brow bulging. "I . . . I . . . don't understand, Meess!" But the beating of his heart and the filling of his throat gave the lie to himself as he spoke.

"Don't you?" asked Madeline in the same firm, deepening voice, and coming slowly towards him, her hands on her hips over

her staid, black crinoline. "Standin' here and speakin' to me . . . dressed like that!" Before he could move she had put out her hand, nerveless usually as wax, and touched his bare breast. A cold flame went stinging through him, and he leapt backwards with a sudden revival of his cloister-bred instincts. He caught up his shirt and held it over his chest.

Madeline was shaken by that noiseless laugh again. Then she stood an instant with her teeth showing, and her bosom heaving under the tight, severe bodice, gazing at him while the sunbeams fell through the skylight upon his brown flesh with the shadowing of dark, curly hair at the breasts. Then in a flash she was gone from the studio with a dip like a swallow's, while Deodato sank down on a packing-case and put his hands to his burning forehead.

He had suffered an unnerving shock—his tongue was dry, his throat constricted, his hands shaking. He could not understand how such demonic power had issued all in a moment from the pallid creature he had watched drifting about the house with her air of unconquered sorrow or shame . . . The repellent creature, with the head like a turnip . . . had he ever really described her so, thought of her so? . . . But what was he to think of her? It seemed as if women were, after all, everything that he had been told at the convent, everything he had been warned about in sermons and ascetic books. But those books gave no real answers to the queries that were now stirring his soul, stirring his flesh to their depths . . . Into his mind swam the memory of the story bandied to and fro in the studio about Madeline and the mysterious vagrant by the canal, and a profound doubt mounted in him. Marsh had said Madeline's troubles had not been her own fault . . . But what did Marsh really know about this girl?

When he sat down to breakfast in the kitchen fresh confusion awaited him. So far from showing any sense of a secret shared with him, Madeline received him with her normal lackadaisical sullenness, slapping down a rackful of toast before him with a contemptuous carelessness that spilled most of it on the cloth. Marsh was buried in the law reports of the *Daily Telegraph*; his wife chewed silently with a circular movement of her heavy chin behind the large black teapot. She rose early from the table, and Madeline took her place. Deodato, despising himself for seeking to attract

her attention, asked shyly for a second cup of tea. "Can't you wait a minnit?" she asked with a sour look, as she buttered a slice of toast . . . Deodato's head spun. Was it consummate acting, or were there two girls in one body?

Over in the studio after breakfast the summer heat did not promote energy.

"Guv'nor," panted Grimes as Mr. Marsh entered the studio during the middle of the morning, "it's time you gave us an 'out' one Sunday afternoon. It's getting to be all work and no play in this blasted academy of yours."

"Langwidge, *please!*" remonstrated Marsh. "And you know quite well Mrs. Marsh'd never hear of an outing on the Sabbath. I'm surprised at you, Grimes!"

"Well, *Padrone*, make it on a day in the week, then!" urged Toni.

"Mrs. Marsh don't approve of any of that sort o' loose gaiety," mumbled Marsh.

"P'raps," suggested Wilkins diplomatically, "if Mrs. Marsh found it fatiguing to come with us, she might allow you to go alone?"

"With Miss Madeline!" Grimes winked at Deodato, who wanted to hit him . . . and then himself. "Be a sportsman, Guv'nor; say next Saturday!"

"And what about the work?" grumbled Marsh.

"You know, *Padrone*," expostulated Toni, "we are always quiet in summer. They do not die then."

"Don't they, indeed? M'reover here's Mrs. Kydney Sumpherson's stone has *got* to be in place at Kensal Green by Monday week. She says she won't pay if it's later than that."

"Wants to clamp something heavy on the old man to keep him from starting up again, does she?" snarled Grimes. "He certainly left her a pot."

"Do stop your irreverence, Grimes! Look here, you fellers! If you'll put your backs into it, and finish off Mrs. Sumpherson's stone, vith the veepers, in time, I'll hire a shay——"

"Two, if you mean to take us all, as I hope you do!" interjected Grimes meaningly.

"Vell then, a two-horse shay. Will that satisfy you, Grimes?"

"You can't drive a pair, Guv'nor." Grimes was in his most exasperating mood.

"Can't I, then? I drove a mourning coach for eight years, so I ought to know! I say I'll drive you all to Highbury Barn for an outing."

"Why not the Alpine Cottage?" pleaded Wilkins. "I'm sure Mrs. Macarthy would make you reel welcome."

"Werry vell, the Cottage then, Vilkins! S'long as you do your work up to time."

The offer seemed good enough, and three weeks later they set out in a two-horse wagonette, as Marsh had promised, at the beginning of a bright afternoon.

Deodato was astonished at the smartness of his companions. Mr. Marsh, it is true, had not dared to change his customary suit of seedy black, and as he had also been lent the sable horses with sweeping tails that drew the wagonette by a friendly undertaker, there was a gloom about the driving end of the equipage that contrasted with the gaily painted wheels and rail of the carriage, with Toni's sky-blue coat and canary vest, with Wilkins's white top-hat, and Grimes's brigand-like sombrero and golden-brown velvetene jacket. Deodato had not felt tempted to emulate the splendour of his comrades, and had only yielded to Grimes's exhortations so far as to buy himself a black velvetene coat and an Italian felt hat in place of the usual Londoner's topper.

As they started he was less interested in the other men's finery than in Madeline, who had mounted to sit beside her father on the box, in a plain black cape, but wearing a bonnet lined with white that struck an unexpected note, not precisely of gaiety but of happiness. Her eyes, Deodato had noticed as she passed him to climb up, were alight; there was a spot of pink in her cheeks, and her lips looked less peevish and dreary than usual.

It was fortunate that the hearse-horses had been schooled to hold to their funereal trot in all circumstances; for no sooner was Mr. Marsh well out of range of the New Road and his wife's eye than he pulled up at a public house in the Hampstead Road for a glass of "pig's ear"; and he repeated this station at the "Britannia" in Camden Town, and then insisted on turning aside from his route to show them the famous "Mother Redcap" in Kentish Town and its famous stunning ale. It was the horses on whose behalf he pleaded a short halt at the "Load of Hay" by Chalk Farm before they began the ascent to the Heath. Here,

too, Mr. Marsh, who was growing very jovial, though, as he reassured Wilkins "nothink like elephant's" pressed Madeline to descend and have "jist a little sip" with the gentlemen. Deodato hurried forward to give her his hand to alight, and noticed the liteness with which she sprang from the wheel with her crinoline billowing round her slim, white-stockinged ankles. Her personality seemed to be changing before his eyes; her pale cheeks were dinted by a perpetual smile; her black eyes danced demurely under the white-lined bonnet at the quips of the men. These all eventually felt emboldened to approach her and offer compliments—in Grimes's case even mild flirtation—all, that is, except Wilkins whose fidelity to his Alpine widow was rock-like.

It was Wilkins also who urged the others in low tones to get the Guv'nor on to the box again while he was still fit to drive. "It's a risky, twisty place old Hampstead High Street," he warned them, and eventually Mr. Marsh was induced to clamber back and pick up a somewhat mixed bunch of reins. However, his mourning steeds were the next best thing to machines, and they luckily met next to no traffic between the villas alternating with nurseries and fields on the long hill-road. It is true that in the narrow High Street of Hampstead village Mr. Marsh became locked in an altercation with a lamp-post, which made Madeline scream; but they had been going at a walk, and Grimes and Wilkins got out and soon put that right. Once on the breezy summit of the Heath, however, the spirit of adventure took charge of their driver, and he could not be prevented from dashing through the middle of the shallow round-pond amid clouds of spray; so that when he tumbled off the box at "Jack Straw's Castle," waving his crape-swathed top-hat and vociferously demanding a pint of "life's a wale," they held a conference (to which Madeline was privy) and induced him, on the ground that he must be tired, to let Wilkins take the reins for the remainder of the journey.

Wilkins could be trusted to bring them safely to the festooned green entrance of the Alpine Cottage Tea Gardens. These stood on the left of the north-going road, with the groves of Ken Wood behind them and the rolling, bush-dotted sweeps of the Heath in front. The Alpine Cottage had a stuccoed lower story, and a timbered top to suggest local colour. The gardens at the back were a criss-cross of gravel paths, flower-beds, green-leaved arbours sheltering white-painted tea-tables, and mysterious tunnels of

box. At the far end a stile communicated with a field-path running round the edge of a dell towards a copse which seemed to be an outpost of the massed trees stretching down to the mansion of Ken Wood.

There was plenty of company on such a fine afternoon, including an elderly couple from Kentish Town drinking tea, and peeling shrimps with grave deliberation through spectacles; a party of five or six shop-boys larking with as many little shop-girls in gaudily-ribboned bonnets, and chasing them in and out of the green tunnels like suburban nymphs; and many affectionate couples being served with tea, shrimps, water-cress and bread and butter by three stout waitresses likely neither to tempt nor to succumb to temptation.

After leaving the wagonette and horses in care of a lame old hostler on the patch of grass in front of the entrance arch, Wilkins lead the way in with a manner already proprietorial. On the steps of the Cottage the Widow Macarthy, amply bosomed, with artificial carmine cheeks, black corkscrew ringlets and sparkling brown eyes, stood to greet them, and gave Wilkins such a resounding kiss in front of everybody that he seemed half-dead after it.

"That's a bedamned handsome woman, even if she is on the shady side o' forty!" murmured Grimes to Toni, "and what she can see in a rabbit like our Mister Wilkins——"

"Perhaps," suggested Toni, with a glint of his slanting eyes, "she knows she can swallow that rabbit—*la vedova!*"

But Mr. Marsh advanced with the intricate steps of one executing a figure-dance. "Dear Madam," he said, "in the melancholy sitiuation in vich you find yourself, may I offer the assistance of myself and my trained staff of monimental artists?"

"Lawks, Mr. Marsh!" exclaimed the Widow Macarthy. "Whatever can you mean?"

"Our methods," pursued Mr. Marsh, raising his voice, "are fam'ly, confidential and in the mos' refined and chaste sense of a dangerous word, *artistic*. Our terms are fair, mod'rate and adjusted to reas'nable terms of credit. Should you, dear Madam," here he lurched forward, and seizing the Widow's hand pressed it respectfully against his left eye, "should you be desirous of possessing a marble bust of the dear departed"—here he solemnly embraced Wilkins, thereby completing his extinction—"then I have

in my studio a band of unrivalled mortuary portraitists, ready to execute him whom we shall never set eyes on again"—he gave a sob—"with acc'racy and despatch. God bleth you both!" concluded Mr. Marsh, removing his hat. "May the altar of Amen be decked for you with a forty-shillin' the yard welwet, silver-edged pall . . . an' . . . an' . . . here's mud in your mince-pie."

With which Mr. Marsh sat heavily down upon his hat in the centre of a flower-bed. Toni went grinning to his assistance.

"The Guvnor's ill, Mrs. Macarthy," said Wilkins, struggling back to life after a terrible pause. The next instant Mr. Marsh confirmed him indelicately, and was helped into the Cottage to be succoured with brandy by Wilkins and Toni.

"Where's Miss Madeline?" asked Grimes. "Ah! here she comes."

Madeline had appeared strolling along the path with her black-fringed parasol shading her face. "Where's father?" she asked them. "I stopped to look at those dear doves in the cot."

"Your father, my dear," said the Widow, "has been took dreadful poorly."

"I'm afraid he can't stand the sun, ma'am," answered Madeline, making a tiny curtsy.

"It is uncommonly hot," assented Mrs. Macarthy, with tact.

At that moment Wilkins reappeared. "Mr. Marsh is lying down on the couch," he said. "He's very much better; but he has rather a head, and thinks he'd better sleep a bit."

"Nobody will disturb him in there," said Mrs. Macarthy briskly, "and now you others ought to have your tea. I'm sure you must be famished, poor dears!"

There was a second's hesitation, and then Madeline slid her hand through Deodato's arm, and began to lead him towards a table in the remotest arbour at the end of the grounds. The other men followed, exchanging glances.

"Well," said Grimes, as they seated themselves, "it's unfortunate about your father, Miss Madeline. But I expect he'll soon get over his touch of . . . er . . . sun . . . and there a'n't no reason, having come so far, why we shouldn't refresh ourselves . . . Per-ticklerly as I know Mrs. Macarthy's teas! Polly"—he winked at the ruddy-cheeked waitress—"a pot o' strong tea for five, no slops, now; *fresh* bread and butter, none o' yesterday's old crusts;

water-creases, shrimps, say six pints to begin with . . . and——” He drew her ear down to his mouth and whispered.

Polly shook her head. “I can’t serve you with that, Mr. Grimes, and you know it,” she protested. “These here aren’t licensed premises.”

“Never mind, Polly,” interposed Wilkins. “I’ll speak to the Missus . . . She’ll give us a ‘lacing’ never fear, Grimes, if I ask her.”

And a “lacing” Mrs. Macarthy gave them, bringing it in the most innocent-looking little black teapot. Brandy it was, and a good old brandy too; and the proprietress did not object to taking a “sip” of it with her guests, looking the while with swimming eyes over the edge of her cup at Wilkins. Then they all fell to ravenously on the shrimps and the cress and the soft new bread and butter; while Grimes, as he poured handfuls of shrimps on to his plate, chanted snatches of the latest songs from the Canterbury and Weston’s music halls.

“You didn’t take nothing in your tea,” said Madeline to Deodato, turning to him with a peeled shrimp in her long, thin fingers and her mouth smilingly open.

“I am not much used to tea yet, Signorina,” he confessed, “and *cognac* in it . . . ah! no!” he shuddered.

“Then, I suppose,” she popped the shrimp into her mouth, and wiped her fingers delicately on her handkerchief, “you think I’m shockin’ to have taken just a teeny weeny drop in mine? Do you?”

Deodato smiled deprecatingly. “It is only a matter of custom, I think,” he answered. “If the English Misses like it——”

“When they can get it!” winked Grimes.

“I was feelin’ quite faint,” pleaded Madeline “seein’ father so ill.”

It struck Deodato that she had not seen her father’s “illness” at all . . . But he only smiled as he offered her more bread and butter, and she returned the gleam of his fine teeth with a glance from between half-closed lids which sent that cold flame through him once more.

He became abruptly conscious of the sultriness of the garden, so closely shut in by tunnels and hedges. The westering sun beat in heavy, slanting rays across the dell that separated the hillside on which the garden stood from Ken Wood. It filled the gravel-paths

with dazzling heat, and shot into the recesses of the arbours opposite, waking light green patches on the dusty greenery. In one of these arbours Deodato could see a boy and a girl, who believed themselves unseen, tenderly embracing. The other shop-boys and girls had disappeared into the tunnels, whence squeaks and laughter came fainter and fainter to his ears. Wilkins had long since followed the exhilarating rustle of the widow Macarthy's skirts into the Alpine Cottage; Grimes had applied so often to the black teapot that he was now slumbering with his ringlets scattered among the peelings of the shrimps on the table-cloth; Toni had lit one of his straw-coloured cigars and strolled off Deodato did not know where.

He was alone in the restless heat with Madeline, who had pulled off her black-and-white bonnet and was leaning back against a branch of the arbour, her little burst of gaiety apparently gone, her eyes closed, the tragic look stamping her face again.

He leaned towards her again, and asked, "Are you ill, too, Signorina?"

For a moment she opened her eyes, wan and inky, upon him. "No," she replied in her husky whisper, "just wretched."

She shut her eyes, and twisted herself restlessly round among the leaves again with her usual slovenly grace. Deodato felt as if some careless young animal were imprisoned in the cage of crinoline, closely buttoned bodice and tight, prim boots.

Outside in the road a hurdy-gurdy began to play an operatic melody, and the ramshackle sentiment of it seemed after a while to melt Madeline, for Deodato saw tears upon her face. Presently she started, stood up, wiping her cheeks with her cuffs, and put her bonnet on her head again. Deodato rose, too, drawn to his feet by an irresistible power. "Would you wish to take a little walk, Signorina?" he heard his voice say through ears buzzing with excitement. He tried, as she moved off on his arm, to combat this tumult, telling himself that he had really no cause to be excited at strolling through dusty shrubberies or on a suburban hillside with this pallid creature in her dark livery of respectability. Yet he could not fight his emotion, as he felt the soft play of her fingers on his arm.

He was intoxicated by the heady odours that now, as the sun finally declined behind the western ridges, mounted from the grass, the shrubs, the flowers in the lozenge-shaped beds. He moved along like a drugged man, with a gradual surrender to the

pressure of the thin fingers that seemed to burn through the velvet of his sleeve. They had come to the stile leading to the fields, and Madeline asked in her husky whisper if they should cross it. He assented, and sprang over to help her down the other side. As he did so he felt as if he were taking an irrevocable leap. But the light weight of her on his arm as she followed drowned all thought again in choking expectation.

She spread her parasol as they walked round the edge of the dell towards the copse. The farewell of the sun blazed through the trees, and the vault of the western sky overhead was a translucent pink, unreal as a conflagration in Armide's palace. Abruptly Madeline, pinching his arm in a keener, more agitated way than before, began to talk with vibrant hoarseness.

"I don't want *you* to think bad of me! I want *you* to understand me, to be a friend! God knows I need one enough . . . with what I have to go through! . . . What's your reel name, tell me! I know they all call you 'Mike' and some long Eyetalian name . . . but I know that's not what you're reelly called. They're all that common, that Grimes and the rest, I often wonder how you stand it, because I know you're a gentleman. What is your name?"

"The only name I have," he answered in a voice the trembling of which surprised himself, "is Deodato."

"Day—what? It's a pretty name, though, Dayo——"

"Deodato."

"I shall call you Dayo? May I? Then I shall feel I am talkin' to a reel friend. You will be friends?"

"Surely; but surely, Signorina." He could not refrain from squeezing her fingers, and she held his tight in a passionate pressure, which at moments he felt was a delight and at moments a trap.

"Don't call me . . . what you did," she coaxed him. "It means just 'Miss,' don't it? Don't 'Miss' me. Call me Madeline!"

"Maddalena!"

"How funny you say it! But it sounds pretty, too! Say it again."

"Maddalena!"

A faintly marked track round the rim of the dell led between high clumps of gorse, isolating them, it seemed, in the twilight from all mankind. In the silence their feet could be heard brushing the grass. The whole world seemed to have grown tense . . . to

be watching . . . and waiting . . . his mind refused to tell him for what.

Her parasol closed with a click. She let it fall to her side, and at the same moment plucked off her bonnet again. He turned his eyes to look at her, and found her head, with its silky brown hair hanging in loops, against his shoulder, and her arm clutching the lapel of his coat. His arm went round her waist, pressing her closer and closer to him.

"I was ashamed," she murmured, "to give way like that in front of you . . . when that organ was playin' . . . Regular cry-baby you must have thought me, Dayo . . . But I've been ill . . . so very ill . . . for such a time! And it has left me terrible weak . . . You knew I had been ill . . . Didn't you? . . . Didn't you?"

"They have told me," he muttered.

"Yes, they all know . . . but what they don't know is the reason . . . They make up shameful tales about me . . . I know . . . I can't stop them, the cowards! . . . When even a gel's own mother believes bad of her!" They had reached, while she was speaking, an old wooden gate into the copse. "Come into this wood," she said pushing the gate open. "I want to tell you the truth, Dayo; but I had rather tell you where you can't see my face . . . A gel is ashamed, . . . even if she's done nothin' to blush for . . . when she has to tell some things."

They were in the wood together now, and it was nearly quite dark. She was a shadow as she faced him, the whites of her eyes gleaming as they had done that night when as a new-comer he had found her crouched at the top of the stairs at home. "*I was done wrong to,*" she whispered, "but don't believe their tales. It was a gentleman . . . yes, a reel gentleman . . . p'raps somethin' higher! I believed him . . . I was a little fool . . . He left me cold . . . cold and dead . . . I never was alive again . . . till you came . . . You remember that first night? . . . I dreamed you was coming . . . I thought at first it was somethin' dreadful that was comin', to crush me altogether . . . Wasn't I a silly? . . . When it was you, Dayo! . . . The first one to make poor me smile again since *then* . . . Oh! how I have needed you, Dayo! . . . What are you doin' with me? . . . How dare you! . . . Stop! . . . You brute! . . . you villain!"

As she spoke of her need of him, she had lifted her hands and

just touched his cheeks with burning finger-tips. And at that something had given way in his brain. He was no longer himself ; another personality, with but a single desire, had taken possession of him. He did not heed her guttural cries, as he struggled to hold her in his arms. . . .

(3)

The gardens were black and deserted when Deodato found his way back to them across the stile, alone. He wondered if the others would have driven away home without him. But when he reached the central alley leading to the entrance, he found them all waiting in the wagonette outside. Wilkins on the box, with the reins in his hands, was bending down to talk to Mrs. Macarthy, who aspired towards him from the little step leading past the wheel to the ground. Beside him on the box sat Madeline, caped and bonneted, neat and prim, rigid and silent . . . Deodato was astounded at her recovered self-possession since, an hour ago, she had broken from him in the wood, after giving him . . . he was sure this was no dream or swoon . . . a burning kiss that seemed to devour his mouth . . . that, while the clamour of her denunciations was still ringing in his ears !

Inside the wagonette Grimes and Toni were whiling away the time of waiting with cards played by the light of one of the driving-lamps which they had turned round in its socket. Marsh reclined near, watching them with a haggard but tender smile, as if in a mood of universal benison.

Toni glanced up at the sound of the truant's footsteps. " So you have come, at last ! " he snarled. " We've waited long enough for you, my boy ! "

" 'S'all righ' ! 'S'all righ' ! " muttered Marsh thickly. " Go it while you're young ! I've been comf'table enough here. "

" Wilkins hasn't been too uncomfortable neither, I think. " Grimes looked up with a wink. " Have you, m'bhoys ? "

Mrs. Macarthy's laced cap abruptly disappeared from its proximity to Wilkins's cheek.

" And where have you been, Mike ? " enquired Grimes, shuffling the pack. " And good Lord, what in Evans' name have you done to your face ? "

Deodato, standing in the rays of the lamp, put his hand to his

cheek and felt his skin rough. He blinked at his finger-tips ; there were spots of blood on them . . . He had not noticed these scratches until now.

"I walked in a wood," he said coolly, "and tore my face with . . . creepers." He accompanied this with pantomime at which everybody laughed.

"Well," said Wilkins, straightening himself on the box, "we must start if we want to get home before midnight."

It was a silent drive, through rural, then semi-rural, then suburban streets lit by sparse gas-lamps, down into London again. Marsh and Grimes nodded off to sleep ; Toni hummed endlessly and irritatingly a Neapolitan song ; Madeline sat still as a figure in a shroud beside the driver.

Deodato, with his elbow on the rail, drew in the coolness of the night ; it seemed to calm the boiling of his veins. Ever since he had stumbled alone out of that wood, he had been in a state of wild conflict. The one certainty that rang in him like a tolling bell was that from the moment his lips had found Madeline's he had been changed, and all life had changed around him. But in the turmoil of his thoughts the new scene would not take stability or perspective. Now a cloud of guilt settled on him ; now apprehensions of the consequences of his action . . . a fear that quickly dissipated itself, for he felt a hardened man. Alternating with these sombre thoughts, was a fierce exultation, a sense of power, which shaped itself into an unrolling mental procession of passion-stirred faces . . . limbs muscular and knotted or elegant and languorous . . . straining torsos . . . polished breasts . . . Then he bent his brows in the endeavour to read the riddle of Madeline. One thing he knew now . . . there had been no truth in the tale of her unwilling seduction. . . . That had never happened to her. . . . No, Deodato realised perfectly what she had done to him ; he was not deceived by her outcries ; and for ever a certain innocence had taken wing from his soul . . . Leaving him coarser ? . . . Leaving him stronger ! That he vowed, gritting his teeth, and clenching his fists in his pockets. But his future ? But the wreckage of an ideal ? . . . Ah ! how far all that hope had receded into obscurity long ago. . . . He could not cope with those ruined visions now. . . .

In Camden Town Mr. Marsh suddenly awoke and trumpeted forth the lamentable intention of taking "a hair of the dog vhat had

bitten him!" Feeble attempts to dissuade him (after all he was "the Guv'nor") failed; and Madeline, when appealed to, merely shrugged her thin shoulders and murmured. "I can't stop him; it's his business!" So Mr. Marsh was escorted by Toni and Grimes into the "Britannia," while Wilkins, after tying the reins round the brake, went in search of an ostler to give the horses some water.

Deodato sprang up, and walking along the floor of the wagonette, spoke softly into the girl's ear from behind.

"Maddalena!" he said, "Maddalena. I wish to talk with you."

She twisted a livid face on him. "Go away!" she said in her hoarsest tone, "I hate you!"

"That is not true!" retorted Deodato, challenging her to meet his eye in the light of the red-lettered lamp over the public-house doors. "You do not hate me. What is the use of pretending to be angry with me for doing what you wished?"

"I did *not* wish it, you dirty little Eyetalian liar!" But she did not raise her eyes from the driving board.

"The more you call me bad names, the more I know you . . . love me." The word came hesitatingly from his lips. It did not seem to him, somehow, quite the right one.

"Love you?" she retorted, lifting eyes wild with hate on him, "I loathe you! Little beast! Go away! Go away! Or I'll tell. . . .!"

A furious retort was on his lips when a burst of noise came from inside the public-house, and Mr. Marsh burst forth, chanting with regrettable distinctness the most shocking verses from the saga of Sam Hall the impenitent chimney-sweep. His satellites followed restraining him, while a knot of bar-loafers cheered. Grimes and Toni made haste to bundle their governor into the wagonette, which Wilkins drove home as sharply as the funeral horses could trot.

Deodato thought it cowardly of the other men to melt away on the door-step of the house in the New Road—Wilkins shouting that he would take the horses back to the stables—and to leave Madeline and him to prop up Mr. Marsh and lead him into the house.

Any hope they might have had of getting him somehow into his bed-room without waking his spouse in hers was grimly undeceived. Mrs. Marsh was waiting for them in the parlour downstairs, and

came gliding out into the passage to turn on the gas-jet just as her husband stumbled over the door-mat.

"Ah! my love!" he called out cheerfully, "'slike flowers in shpring to be'old you once more on this drear autumn night! The fellers and I have had a rig'lar Bushey Park!"

Deodato thought he had never seen anything so evil as the glare that came out of her eyes as she squeaked, "*Marsh, you been drinkin'!*"

"O'ny a tiny drop o' Brian O'Linn, give you my shacred word! Go to bed, my old gooseberry pudd'n! My boy here," he fondled Deodato, "my dear bhoy will help me up the apples and pears."

"*Your* boy!" Mrs. Marsh took a forward step with a positive growl. "Have you no shame?"

Madeline uttered a cry. Her breath was coming and going in gusts of terror. "Don't, mother!" she wailed. "I'm fr-frightened of you when you look like that!"

"Shame?" Mr. Marsh answered his wife. "What's to be 'shamed for? Fine upright bushel o' coke, my boy!" He tapped Deodato on the shoulder, and nearly fell over. "Trust him anyvheres," he said, clinging to Deodato's coat; "trust him vith your last Abraham! I'll be true father to him! He shan't never want . . . trust *me* for that!"

Madeline gave a little scream, and hid her face. Deodato could not see any reason for her terror, though Mrs. Marsh looked ugly enough, glowering at her husband. Then Marsh, bursting again, most untimely, into "Sam Hall," tried to take the staircase by assault, fell, and rolled to the bottom, momentarily stunned.

Madeline shrieked, and rushed to his side. Deodato would have done the same, but Mrs. Marsh intercepted him. "Git out o' my house!" she said, "d'you hear! Out o' my house! I wonder you a'n't ashamed to have come here at all. But you shan't defile a decent, religious woman's house a minnit longer! Walk out! Straight out! Before I call the pleece to put you out!"

For a second Deodato faltered, almost fancying that by some miracle Mrs. Marsh knew what had happened between him and her daughter this evening. Then, realising the absurdity of the idea, and completely bewildered by her savagery, he began to protest.

"Can't you go?" Madeline tore at his sleeve. She was on her knees, supporting her step-father's head on her lap. Marsh's eyes were rolling wildly, so that he was evidently alive. "Go!" cried Madeline again, "you done enough for to-day! Go to Grimes's place! Father'll send you a message in the mornin' . . . Ah! don't, mother, don't!" She flinched as if struck by a whip, though Mrs. Marsh had only turned her head towards her.

Deodato shrugged his shoulders. He was tired of them all. "Very well, Signorina," he said; "send me a message to Grimes's lodgings to-morrow morning," and slammed the door upon the grotesque-tragic group, more confounded than he had yet been in England.

CHAPTER SEVEN

FLIGHT

(I)

IT was well past midnight by the time Deodato arrived outside Grimes's lodgings in Somers Town, and his discreet knocking brought no reply from the sleepers within. Once he thought he heard a faint bark from a yard adjoining the house; but, after listening a minute, found everything as still as before. He was hesitating whether he should risk waking everybody up by banging with the knocker, when he heard the sharp little bark again, unmistakably this time, followed by a cautious scraping of bolts as one of the wooden yard-gates opened a foot or two to allow a head in a cotton night-cap to protrude.

"Vat's up vith you, cully?" asked a gruff but not unkindly voice. "Was you tryin' to axe for summun? They're all dossed down, you know."

"I wish to see Mr. Grimes," explained Deodato.

The white-capped head shook. "I don't know nothink about 'im," said its owner. "But you better not wake Mr. Jilkes the landlord, my boy! He's werry bad-tempered—*ultray cativa*, you know!"

Deodato stared at him: he seemed an oldish fellow. "What did you say?" he asked.

"*Ultray cativa*—that's all."

"Are you Italian?"

The stranger chuckled. "Eyetalian? Lord no! That's a good 'un!" The little yapping bark sounded again behind the gates, accompanied by a snuffling. "Quiet, little rogue!" said the night-capped man.

"But you spoke in Italian," persisted Deodato.

"Did I? It's just our talk. Old Porsini taught it to all of us origin'ly, I s'pose. Vat do you mean to do?"

Deodato looked up at the windows irresolutely. "I do not know," he muttered.

"*Yeute lente*, are you, boy?" asked the stranger. "No bed? You better come in here and doss down alongside o' me." He opened the gate a little wider, and Deodato, still undecided, followed him in. The yard contained a good-sized stable, now rather decayed. In an empty loose-box a lantern glimmered, and Deodato heard a patter of little feet running back into it. He looked about him, and in the middle of the yard saw a tall, oblong structure, muffled in drapery.

"That's the *slumarey*, you see," said his host.

Deodato shivered. "It looks like a coffin!" he said.

The old man chuckled. "No, no, no! That a'n't the coffin! Much too big! That's the temple of mirth—that is! But come, you doss down! Plenty o' straw in the stable here. Mr. Jilkes charges four browns for the use of it and the yard for the *slumarey* yonder. 'E keeps his donkey in the nex' box there . . . Are you *yeute munjare*, too? Nothink to eat, you know?"

"*Mangiare*? No, thank you, I have eaten."

"Then doss down, quick! There's two o'clock strikin'."

The lantern threw but a dim light on the stable as Deodato entered it behind his host. He heard a rustling in the corner, where the little dog was coiled down in the straw. Then he flung himself down overcome with fatigue, just as the old man blew out the light. In a minute or two, with one of the swift, vital, adaptations of youth, Deodato, stripped of all his worries, had sunk into a deep sleep.

From this he nevertheless woke early, for the summer sunshine, pouring into the yard outside, penetrated in strong shafts into the loose-box where he was lying. He sat up and looked round him. Then he groaned, for it seemed to him that he was fated never to get back into the world of sanity again. Over the partition of the box in which he was sitting the grey head of a donkey peered at him with a ruminative interest as it chewed a mouthful of hay. Below, limply ranged against the wooden partition, a number of weird little dolls seemed to be bowing their heads in greeting to the newcomer. "*Signore Dio!*" moaned Deodato, clutching at his tangles of hair, "what country is this that I have come to?"

"Merrie England!" said a voice, and his friend of the night before entered from the yard. At his heels pattered a little, black mongrel dog, with a plumed tail, dark, intelligent eyes, and flopping

ears, who stretched out his front paws, and laying his head on the ground, seemed also to make obeisance to the stranger.

In the daylight Deodato could see that his benefactor had a complexion of an even richer hue, purplish and weather-beaten, than Mr. Marsh, with thick eyebrows like two sloping bands of black fur in spite of his age.

"Signore, who are these creatures?" demanded Deodato, pointing to the row of mutely reverential dolls.

"Lord! Don't you know?" The old man took from his lips the short clay pipe he was smoking, and scratched his bald head with its ring of grizzled hair, upon which the night-cap had now been replaced by a battered topper of grey cloth, plentifully stained by soot, mud and rain.

"Don't you know," he repeated. "Yet, you come from Italy, don't you, same as them? Old Porsini brought 'em from Italy, 'fore ever I was born. Vy," he stooped and picked up the largest and gaudiest of the puppets, "don't you know who *this* is?"

Deodato stared at the doll, which wore a pointed cap of many coloured rays, and had a hump on its back, and a hooked nose with a curving chin coming to meet it all but the fraction of an inch. "Who's that now?" asked the man.

Deodato shook his head blankly. "Vat! Did you niver hear o' Punch?" enquired the old man.

"Pulcinella!" murmured Deodato, picking up the figure.

"Vat's that?" enquired Mr. Pikebarn suspiciously.

"It is the Italian name for him, Mister."

"Is it?" Mr. Pikebarn took Punch away from him, and put a protective hand over his face, as if to shield him from the evil eye. "I niver heerd that from Porsini. You can't call 'im that 'ere. He's 'Punch' here and no mistake."

"So these," said Deodato, comprehending at last, "are *fantoccini*!"

"Sutt'nly not," said the old man in a grave voice; "not a bit like it. *Fantoccini* is common stuff . . . not much more in 'em than in them mechanical dancing dolls atop o' the organs. But Punch, my good sir, is a myst'ry. We 'as our own langwidge, as you notices last night, and we 'as our own call."

He thrust his hand for a moment into his scarlet flannel vest and fixed a tiny tin instrument in his mouth, through which he uttered

the peculiar nasal squeal that was the sweetest of all music to the children of England. "There," he said, replacing the "call" in his bosom, "that's the myst'ry of our perfession; o'ny Punch-men can make that 'call' and use it. M'reover, we 'as our rights vich no other show can claim. Punch is hexempt from the Police Act, I'd 'ave you to know; there's not a word about Punch in it all. The perlice can't stop Punch, nor yet move 'im on. Punch is a highly clarsical dramma, sir; them there's the *dramatis persony*," he waved his hand toward the dolls, "and vat you saw out in the yard las' night is the *slumarey* . . . the frame . . . the show as you might call it! But," he went on, "niver you mind my *charferin* jist now. You want to find your cully, don't you? afore he gits to 'is pitch, wh'rever it may be?"

Deodato thanked him, and murmuring, "*Arrivederci!*" hurried out of the yard to the front door of the house, where the milk was just arriving. As the servant opened the door to take it in, Deodato forced entrance with it and asked for Mr. Grimes's room. He found his colleague asleep in a tawdry, tasselled night-cap on the first floor, and shook him violently.

"What the devil——" Grimes began at this irruption; but after hearing the tale Deodato poured out, he grew thoughtful. "Turned you out, did she?" he ruminated. "Then you can take it from me, you won't niver go back there again."

"But it is not her house . . . not her business . . . it is Marsh's!"

"On paper p'raps. Not in practice, by chalks! If she says you got to go, why then you're . . . outside! . . . Just see if you don't get the key of the street sent you by a ticket-porter this morning! . . . You know," he reflected, "she was pretty certain to come to think as she does about you sooner or later."

"Think what about me, Grimes? I am sure the English are all——"

"Mad," Grimes coolly finished for him. "I know. You've told me so before. And mind," he ran his fingers through his greased ringlets, "I dessay you're right too . . . in a way."

"Oh! so you agree you are all mad?"

"In a way . . . per'aps. But then in a way there may per'aps be method in our madness, old chap. And Marsh getting so uncommon fond o' you as he brought into the business from nowhere, so to speak—well, she was bound, a jealous woman like her, to believe *that* . . . wasn't she?"

"To believe what?"

"Why, that you were his son o' course!"

"I? The son of Marsh? . . . *Dio mio!* . . . He only called me 'my son' sometimes out of . . . out of affection."

"Too much affection, if you ask me."

"But, Grimes, it was a joke!"

"*She* didn't take it as a joke, by gad!"

"She thinks Marsh is . . . my father? . . . But . . . but . . . how could it be?"

"Oh! the usual way, I s'pose. Nothing extraordinary about it. You're not such a Johnny Raw, are you Mike, as never to have heard o' sich a thing as a love-child?"

"But it is absurd! Marsh, my father!"

"Well, who *is* your father, Mike? . . . There you are," he emphasised, as Deodato made a despairing gesture. "There's a mystery about you, and here's one answer to it. Why should Marsh bring home a stranger like you all of a sudden, make a pet of him—and there's no doubt he did—we chaps in the studio didn't half like it, 'specially Toni—and talk of him one day coming into half the business. . . . I heard him."

"It was his humour."

"Humour or not, it must a' sounded disagreeable to his wife. If he means to do all this for you, what becomes of her and her daughter?"

"Miss Madeline!" Deodato bit his lip with a frown.

"Ah! Meess Madeline, precisely, old boy! What were you and she doin' in that wood? . . . Don't tell me, I know you were there."

"Oh! you are talking nonsense, Grimes! . . . *Signore Dio!* I see it is all hopeless. . . . I must go away. . . . I never want to see Marsh or his ugly wife again!"

"Or his ugly step-daughter?" Grimes pursed his lips virtuously.

"Looks like an ugly biz to me altogether."

"Well, it is all over for me! . . . I take myself off at once."

"Hadn' you better wait and see if a message comes? P'raps after all, Madeline'll have been able to beg you off, and get you taken back."

"That is very likely . . . very," said Deodato with his sculptured nostrils quivering angrily. "And I tell you I do not wish to be

begged off . . . or taken back . . . by Miss Madeline . . . or anyone else."

"Well, don't you at least want your little bits and pieces, your property?"

"I have nothing at all . . . *niente* . . . they can keep what I have . . . except . . . oh! it does not matter . . . a little face I modelled . . . but it was with the clay of Marsh . . . he may keep it, too."

"Well," Grimes made a grimace, "you must do what you think best. Nobody can't stop you, if your mind's made up. But just wait till I've been round to the studio. I might come back with some news."

"Thank you, Grimes, perhaps I will," said Deodato with apparent irresolution, though really his mind was made up. "I will walk up and down a little outside here now . . . and think."

As Grimes declared he must have his "last mouthful o' Murphy," and rolled himself up in the blankets again, Deodato strolled into the yard, uncertain again what he had better do. To leave Marsh was to sever himself finally from the Attorney Greeves, his only link with the secret of his parentage, but (he was now certain) an inexorably silent link. It meant leaving Madeline, just at the hour when passion had been awakened and was raging in him. . . . But might it not be wiser to leave her before worse entanglements were woven round him. He did not care for her threat to "tell"; he felt sure she would not. But did she deserve anything better than that he should turn his back upon her, after the way she had treated him coming home from Hampstead? Yet could he leave her? Was he not bound to her by his own act? Bound? His whole being revolted. Had he not come across half Europe to be free?

"You're a-thinkin' werry hard, cully," said the voice of the old showman from the stable, where he was snipping and stitching at his dolls' toilette, now and again driving in a tack with the handle of his great clasp-knife. "You looks to me," he went on as he calmly pursued his task, "all in a turmoil like, 'sif you didn't know vich way to turn. No use gittin' in sich a state, you know. That won't git you novheres. *Ultray cativa!* You should keep calm, vwhatever happens. I always do. You don't want to git all of a shiver, same as Punch does vhen he sees this 'ere figure . . . the ghost of his wife, vat he killed. All the same," he looked ruefully

at the much-battered puppet. "This vun's gittin' so's neether Punch nor no one else would reckernise vat it's meant for!"

"Give it to me," said Deodato abruptly, squatting down in the straw, and trying to drive away the torment of his thoughts. "What did you say this figure should be? A spectre? It looks more like the handle of a door now! Give me that knife of yours, will you?"

Rather doubtfully the showman passed over his knife. Deodato snatched up the puppet, and began to cut gashes in its face.

"Go easy!" remonstrated the Punch-man. "Easy with the *slumarey*, boy! These figures cost money, don't you fergit!"

"I will not harm it." Deodato laughed shortly as he continued to hack the features into a ghastly dreariness.

After a minute or two the old man came and stood looking over his shoulder. "You're an artist, my boy!" he suddenly declared. "Who are you?"

"Never mind!" retorted Deodato. "Wait just a moment! . . . So. There is your *spettro*! How do you like him?"

"Like it!" The showman turned the puppet round gingerly in his fingers. "You expect me to *like* it? Vy, it frightens me! D'you expect me to show that to the children? Vy, they'd run away screamin' vith their *denari* still in their pockets the moment they *vardered* it! First glimpse! You're too powerful in your idees, my lad, for Punch and Judy! But I reckon you got suthin' in that 'ed of yourn all the same. Come now! Vat *is* your pitch?"

"Pitch? You mean business? I have none. I run away." Deodato sat moodily silent, his long chin in his hands.

"*Scaparey*, eh? Run off!" The Punch-man now seemed really interested. "Vat have you done then? Swooped a till? . . . No, you h'a'nt the cut of an area sneak. . . . G'rotter? . . . No, that's nonsense. You got clean eyes. Got a *dona* into trouble?"

Deodato gave the faintest shrug.

"Yes, that's more your ticket. You're just the sort o' boy to make poor venches throw their caps over the vindmills, a'n't you? Vell now, you *varder* here! Look here, I mean. I'm vithout a Co.-and-Co. . . . pardner, that is, jist now. Poor Villiam, my Co.-and-Co., died las' month of a fevier——"

"Shall I carve you his tombstone?" jerked Deodato.

"No, I don't fink so, thankee," answered the showman gravely.

"Villiam was buried werry plain and simple like."

"Thank God for that!" exclaimed Deodato. "And thank God

I am done for ever with fat angels and fat cherubs and weepers and anchors."

"I dunno vat you may mean by that. I hope you a'n't done with angels, 'cos I don't want no young devil a pardnerin' o' me. You'll need to be a good boy if you comes along o' me."

"If . . . *What* do you say, Signore?"

"No Signorey for me, if you please, laddie. Plain Mister Pikebarn. The same is my title and name. . . . I do 'old by the Mister suttlnly. So p'raps would you if you'd raised yourse'f by your own efforts, like vat I done; for I don't pretend I comes of any large beginnin's—though vith the best mother in the world!" He raised his disreputable topper piously. "But *Mister* Pikebarn they call me now, among all our people."

"But what is it you want me to do?" asked Deodato in amazement.

For reply Mr. Pikebarn moved his foot, and a hollow boom came from amid the straw, which made Deodato jump, while the little dog, Toby, coiled up in a corner, raised his head and barked expectantly.

"Jist that," said Mr. Pikebarn. "Beat the *tambora* for me! I s'pose you kin bang a drum to let the folk know Punch is a-comin'? The *pipares*," he plucked a set of pan-pipes from beside the "call" in the bosom of his scarlet waistcoat, "the *pipares*, now, is more difficult. You'll have to learn them . . . to play 'em just so." He ran them along his lips with a clear ripple of sound. "Jist like that! Quite simple reelly. I'll learn you. . . . Then, you know, there's the dialect you has to hold vith Punch from outside the frame." He sat down with an extraordinarily solemn and earnest face upon a corn-bin and expounded.

"We're not, you mus' know, like some o' these Punches vat goes along happy-go-lucky, puttin' in and leavin' out. That's not Punch, believe me! Put in Yankee nigger figures, and a Rooshian bear some o' them, so I'm told! That's not Punch. You got to speak your piece right, same as Porsini and the other big uns before us used to do: 'Vell, Mr. Punch, 'ow de do?' says you like. 'Ow de do,' says Punch." Mr. Pikebarn uttered the reply in a surprising squeak through his "call." "Then, 'I'm pooty well, Mr. Punch,' says you—and be perlite and *look* at Punch! I've seen outside-men vat niver *varders* Punch, but squints down at the childer to see 'ow many *soldi* they're likely to get, and up at the vinders to

see if there's any pretty nuss-maids to vink at. That's not Punch. You got to tell yourself. . . you got to *b'lieve* vith all your heart, as he's *ALIVE*! Else you're no *bonar* as my Co.-and-Co."

"Well, *Padrone*," cried Deodato in a burst of forced exhilaration. "I will make new figures and persons for your comedy——"

"Dramma!" said Mr. Pikebarn inflexibly. "Nor ve don't vant nothink noo at all. The old *slumarey* is good enough for us. They're clarsical. I don't say," he conceded generously, wagging his clay pipe, "but what, vith your cliver fingers, you might in time learn to *copy* the true figures. There a'n't no 'arm in copyin'; it's vhen you flies off into idees o' your own that the trouble begins. I don't 'old vith that. Be clarsical, I says. If the folks won't pay to *varder* the clarsical dramma, then, dam' 'em, let 'em go hungry. I'm not a goin' to give 'em noo and furrin kickshaws. So, if you please—vat's your name?"

"Oh! Michael Angelo," said Deodato despairingly.

"Ah! that's a fine name. Clarsical, too, in it's vay, I should guess. Vell, now, Mr. -er-er—"

"Mike will do, it seems."

"It *is* easier, a'n't it? Vell, Mike, you'll please to speak it all as it's been handed down, 'Vell, Mr. Punch,' says you, 'Ow de do, Mr. Punch,' says you . . . jist like that. That's the *bona parlare*. As for the *denari*, the money, you shall have at startin' a fourth-share; then vhen you knows your *slumareys*, the usual outside man's third. Arterwards we'll see. So now are you ready to *scaparey*?"

Deodato smiled wistfully at his new owner. "If I could eat something. . . . I have the hunger now."

"*Yeuta munjare*, still, are ye? Vell, the first decent little pub ve comes to ve'll ave a bite o' breakfuss. And, as you looks *cativa* if ever I see a chap, I'll push the frame at startin'. . . . Arterwards, it'll be your part; you unnerstan'? Come, let's pack up, and off! 'The Devil's dead!' as Punch tells yer! Toby, lad, you rogue, come 'ere and have your collar on!"

A quarter of an hour later, up the still empty street, the Punch and Judy show, throwing a long, coffin-like shadow in the sunshine, trundled creaking on its two-wheeled barrow, manfully pushed by Mr. Pikebarn, who also bore the black box full of the puppets on his shoulder. Beside the barrow, Toby, decked in a red and white frill, stepped with the dignity of a tiny *haute école* horse; and behind,

carrying the big drum on his shoulders, Deodato staggered along, his eyes dreamily fixed on the stones of the street. At the corner Mr. Pikebarn swung the show to the right and made for Islington. Showman, frame and dog passed out of sight round the corner, and Deodato followed, aimless and resigned.

(2)

The little procession had not disappeared ten minutes when a perturbed little man in black, carrying a carpet bag, knocked on the door of Grimes's lodging-house, and kept on knocking till that gentleman put his head out, still in his night-cap and swearing.

"Is Mike here?" shouted Mr. Marsh, almost in a frenzy.

"He said, guv'nor, he was going to stroll about a bit outside till he heard from you."

Mr. Marsh ran to the top of the street and looked each way; but both ways were empty save for a yodelling milkman.

He came trotting back to the lodging-house, wailing, "He's gone! He's gone!" Then to Grimes's acute astonishment he burst into tears.

"Good Lord, Guv'nor! What . . . hever . . . his . . . hup?" The night-cap disappeared from the window, and in a minute or two, Grimes, partially clad, joined his employer in the street. "Are you ill, guv'nor?" he asked solicitously, taking Marsh by the arm. "Or is there trouble at home? Mrs. Marsh? Miss Madeline?"

Marsh was wiping his eyes on a black-and-white checked handkerchief. "No, no," he said, recovering himself, "nothink like that. Mrs. Marsh is well, thank God, and I don't see nothink different in Maddy. . . . But it hurts me, Grimes, that pore boy bein' sent away like this, without a penny, into a world he don't and never will understand. Why, he hasn't even had the chance to take his few poor belongings vich I've brought in this 'ere bag. And what had he *done*? I'm sure I dunno. Anyone would a' thought, the way Mrs. Marsh created, he was a rig'lar tea-leaf or somethink worse. And he's the innercentest creature alive, Grimes."

Grimes coughed dubiously.

"I assure you he is," insisted Mr. Marsh. "No idea how to look arter himself. You and I wouldn't understand that, nacherally, but he's an artist—if you know what that means."

"Thanks for the flowers, Guv'nor! One gets recognition for one's work in the end—strike me pink if one doesn't!"

"Oh! that's different," explained Mr. Marsh. "You're a man o' sense, and a business man. You make what people want—you and I are some use to seeciety—and seeciety knows it. We shan't ever want for our saint-and-sinner. But that pore boy—look here, what I found he's been workin' on, when there wasn't no one to see him!"

Marsh opened the bag, and produced, wrapped in a rag, a clay model of a girl's face in bas-relief, breathless and wind-swept, the lips parted, the hair on end in the breeze. As the wrapping fell away, it seemed to leap out alive, to send the wind that agitated it whistling down the quiet street.

"My Gawd!" murmured Grimes, and taking it in his palm regarded it with an odd kind of reverence.

"Look at the letterin' he's cut underneath," said Marsh in a puzzled tone. "'*Primavera.*' Would that be Eyetalian, d'you think, for Primrose Hill?"

"How do I know?" Grimes seemed absorbed in the modelling, over which he was passing his fingers.

"Useless, a'n't it?" said Marsh. "Who's goin' to buy that sort o' thing? No dignity! No c'rect measurements." Mechanically he tested the face from chin to nose and nose to brow with his folding-ruler. "No *meaning!*" he added. "What's it meant for? An A.D.? A seraph? I'll lay it a'n't a portrait model of any o' my clients. Nobody a'n't never seen anythink the least bit like it."

"Why, Guv'nor," Grimes asked him pityingly, "haven't you ever seen little gals just like this runnin' about the streets at the beginning o' spring? Didn't you see them little milliners yesterday up at the Alpine Cottage?"

"Can't say I remember 'em," returned Mr. Marsh. "But any'ow, Grimes—street-girls, shop-girls! You a'n't never goin' to tell me as they're fit subjects for the art o' sculpture. Use your mince-pies, my boy! A thing like this is vulgar, perfectly vulgar! Who'd put such a face on their fam'ly vault? Answer me that!"

"As you say, Guv'nor, as you say," rejoined Grimes with a kind of weary bitterness; and then abruptly. "He's had the guts to cut his lucky, the little beggar! Oh! Gawd! Why didn't I? Before it was too late!"

"'Ow can you talk sich sinful nonsense, Grimes?" answered Marsh, while his eyes filled again with tears. "I can't abear to think o' that pore boy . . . a furriner, too . . . with no more sense in his Uncle Ned than to model things like this . . . wanderin' alone about this dreadful Lunnon. It's a werry queer place to be in——"

"So you always say, but I don't think it's so bad," retorted Grimes a little truculently.

"To him it will be, Grimes! You can take my word for it," hinted Mr. Marsh darkly. "'Sides I *liked* the boy. He was a companion to me. He had a pleasant, smilin' way."

"Precious sight *too* smilin', if you ask me," grunted Grimes. "Seemed to me as if he was always laughing at a party behind that perlite manner o' his. Toni always said he was . . . and Toni knows the Eyetalians."

"Mike was worth a dozen Tonies. He was a son to me!"

"Look here, Guv'nor," said Grimes, screwing up his courage, "I wouldn't use that expression again if I was you. Excuse my takin' the liberty of mentioning it; it's well-intentioned, I assure you. I'd cut out that expression. It's liable to be misunderstood, you see."

"Misunderstood? By 'oo, pray, Grimes?"

"By M—— by anybody. You keep on saying he was a son to you. What if certain parties should come to think he's reelly your son."

"Mike, my son! Why I been married eighteen years!"

"I've heard of unlikelier things."

"You mean . . . people may think . . . vy, Grimes, that's shockin'!"

"No, jist human nature—if you understand me."

"But nobody knows who Mike's father is!"

"Some may think they do."

"What, and him an Eyetalian!"

"You're always goin' about with Eyetalians, a'n't you? You always say they're the best sculptors, though I dunno where you find it. You look for them everywhere for piece jobs, don't you? Soho, Saffron Hill, Leicester Square! Some people might think, you know, that you weren't merely professionally interested."

"'Ow disgustin'!" declared Marsh sincerely. "Vy, I hate women . . . not includin' Mrs. Marsh under that head, o' course."

But I never had any children, not in lawful vedlock. And you think——”

“I don’t think nothink, Guv’nor. I o’ny say other people may think——”

“Vy, Greeves, the attorney, he don’t know himself who Mike’s father is, I don’t believe . . . Oh! I o’ny wish old Beaky was here, that I do! If there’s a man on he’rth could discover the secret o’ that boy’s parentage, it’s Mossoo Charles! . . . But now he’s gone!”

“Who’s gone? Your Froggie friend?”

“Oh! yes. O’ course, he’s gone too. But I mean Mike. I don’t know whether I’ll ever see him again, vith his charming little ways, and the readiness he had to listen and be taught.”

“You never taught him to make things like this head, Guv’nor, believe me!”

“I don’t mean that. I mean what I taught him about life . . . and crime . . . warnings like . . . all that sort o’ thing. So perlite and obleeing he always was . . . my boy!”

“Guv’nor! Once more, *don’t*!”

Mr. Marsh sighed. “I mus’ try to find him some’ow, though Lord o’ny knows how it can be done. I jist got to get him back, I tell you! Meanwhile,” he stooped and picked up the carpet bag which he had set down, “I s’pose I better look arter the poor lad’s things for him till he returns.”

“Excuse me, Guv’nor,” asked Grimes. “Do you extry special want this little head back?”

“Me? No! It’s no use to me, I reckon, nor to him. Just fiddlin’ vith clay, that’s what it amounts to. You keep it if you want it, Grimes. I’m sure it’s of no value.”

“That’s what I wonder,” murmured Grimes, putting it carefully into his pocket.

CHAPTER EIGHT

PULCINELLA

(I)

ABOUT the time this colloquy concluded Deodato and his new master were seated on the base of some railings at the New River head in Islington, taking their breakfast of bread and cold bacon, and passing a jug of beer from hand to hand. Beside them stood the frame of the show, displaying above its gilded and painted proscenium the inscription :

THE DOMINION OF DREAMS

Punch's Theatre

Deodato spelled out the words with his lips. "Quite c'rect, my boy," said Mr. Pikebarn, shovelling bacon into his mouth on the edge of his clasp-knife. "I'm a sort o' peddler of dreams, if you understand me. I takes folk out o' their everyday vurld into a kingdum o' my own. And in this vay I reckon do more for 'em than the leegitimate theayter. For vat do you see in the leegitimate theayter? Vy, men and women, same as you might meet 'em in the street outside, 'cept for a bit o' paint and fine clothes. But vat do I show? Immortals! Critturs vat can't age. Critturs vat don't move, don't speak, don't act, don't live and don't die like flesh an' blood. Somethink diff'rent: that's Punch. Look at him now—o' course, you can't, he's in the box: I don't make him cheap by taking him out in the street for anyvun to see him, and call out 'Vy, it's only a doll!'; I never have let childer come inside the frame and *varder*, it's inc'rect—but lookin' at Punch (pass the jug will ye, if you don't vant no more), I often think that he's better off nor vat I am. He has no stummick to feel hungry—*yeuta munjare*—no corns on his feet to make trampin' a pain to

him. He's not only never sick ; he's never sad—and that's a great advantage over a yuman bein', don't you think ? He never was jilted by no sweetheart, or if he was he don't care. His wife don't try to hen-peck him—not twice she don't, Judy ! He cheats the 'angman, and he gets the better of Old Nick. 'Hurra ! the Devil's dead !' 'Ow many yumans would like to be like him and act as he does ? "

" But I think he was a very wicked man—Pulcinella," objected Deodato.

" Ah ! " replied Mr. Pikebarn, " that's jist the reason of his success ! Whereas these 'ere *fantoccini*, all prettiness and gay dances and flaxen-haired little dollies, they don't reach to the depths o' the yuman 'art like Punch does. The yuman 'art, my boy, has a black depth to it. Every man loves to see some vun else's trouble. That's the secret o' the clown in the pantomime—the butterslide, so long's we're not on it. That's vy ve likes to read about murders, and go and vatch 'angings and sich-like. And ve all laugh ven someone else's apple-cart gits upset. That's yumour, that is, the other feller's troubles. So ven Punch beats his wife and knocks down the Beadle and bonnets the furrin' Gentleman and hangs Jack Ketch on his own gallows—that's the sweetest fun in the vurld." Mr. Pikebarn compressed his lips firmly and nodded. " I know something o' life, I can tell you. You don't travel round vith Punch without learning a lot about yuman natur."

" You think it is so wicked, Mister ? " enquired Deodato, feeding scraps of bacon to Toby, who was standing in front of him in his frill, his little legs stiff and quivering, making imperious whimpers.

" Not wicked, I wouldn't call it. More childish like. Look at your ordin'ry man o' the vurld. How does he act ? Far as I can judge, on the ideas of Punch. Knock him down and rob him, and say all the time you're so sorry to 'ave to do it . . . so sorry . . . so sorry . . . so sorry," he squeaked suddenly through his " call," bringing several ragged children hurrying to the spot by the river-rails.

" *Scaparey !* Off vith you ! " Mr. Pikebarn warned them. " Ve're doin' no pitch for a good half-hour. Go away and git your *quartereens* ! Bring your fardens or Punch won't come up for you at all . . . Yes," he continued, as the children drew off abashed, " Punch is always so full o' noble intenshuns . . . And ven he sees the Ghost he's so full o' piety ! Jist like a successful swindler dyin' "

with all the conserlations o' the Church . . . It's jist Punch all the time! . . . Vell, this *charferin* don't bring in the *soldi major*, nor yet the *quartereens*. If you're ready, we'll do a short pitch right-away here; jist to break you in, so to speak, and see 'ow much o' vat I told you you remember." . . .

That night Mr. Pikebarn procured leave from a farmer by Stoke Newington Ponds to sleep in his barn, and the next morning he was aroused early by the sound of his own pan-pipes. Opening his eyes sleepily, he beheld his new assistant, who last night had seemed utterly fatigued by the unaccustomed tramping, awake and sitting cross-legged on a bundle of hay, struggling with the pipes. From a window in the roof the sunbeams filled with motes and floating straws streamed down upon his figure, while the wind, sighing softly under the closed doors, made them creak and jar against their bolts. The golden light awoke the deep-blue sheen in Deodato's curls, and the narrowing of his eyes, the in-drawing of his already hollow cheeks, the pulling down of his upper lip as he strove to master the novel instrument, gave him, to the old man's eyes, an uncanny look. Despite the name of his pipes Mr. Pikebarn had never heard of Pan or of the satyrs; but he had seen imps in the pantomime and goblins in children's chap-books, and he had an uneasy feeling of a kinship between these creatures and the odd young man he had so impulsively taken under his wing.

Dog Toby, indeed, did not seem to share his uneasiness. When Deodato had started to elicit squeals from the pipes, he had raised his head from the straw and given Deodato a long, sharp look. Then with a grunt he had turned himself round sixteen times and burrowed into the straw again. Toby's master, however, felt in a depressed way that his new Co.-and-Co. was likely to prove full of quaintness and fancifulness. Ignoring the moral of the inscription over his show, Mr. Pikebarn doubted whether a young fellow like this would ever really do for a Punch-man. Frighten the children some day, most likely, with pranks like that terrifying head he had made for the Ghost . . . But at that moment an excruciating note from the amateur Pan drove these thoughts out of his head. "If you can't sleep," he growled, "and von't let anybody else, give me the *pípare*s and let me show you a bit."

"You said, wake at six," Deodato reminded him.

"Werry vell; but 'ow many times am I to tell you, spit into 'em, don't blow into 'em! So!" Mr. Pikebarn took the pipes, and

rippled up and down the scale with a professional finish. "You're one o' these chaps that always goes too fast, *I* can see. Vant to run before you can valk! But vith me you has to begin at the beginning, and learn everythink proper. Else you'll never do for my Co.-and-Co. . . . But I'll learn you!"

(2)

And Mr. Pikebarn was as good as his word, never ceasing to instruct, exhort and reprimand the neophyte for a day of the ensuing weeks during which they skirted the rural suburbs of London with the show, and from time to time came raiding into the city itself. Deodato did not prove a wholly satisfactory pupil, for he was unable (in Mr. Pikebarn's opinion), to comprehend the augustness of the craft into which he was having the privilege of being initiated. He was honest with the *denari*, however, a grand and unusual merit, according to Mr. Pikebarn's experience, in an outside man; and he was also clever, without realising it, in the smiling way he had of coaxing the *soldi* and the *quartereens* out of the children and their nurses, who seemed to adore him on sight ("Though, dang it!" his master once reflected, as he vigilantly watched the collection through a hole in the drapery of the show, "he has a vay of handing that bag round as if he'd vunce been a churchwarden or somethink!")

It was also a good point in the boy, Mr. Pikebarn reckoned, that he was as a general rule even-tempered, and never given to grumbling over long walks, short commons and rough beds or no beds at all. Just occasionally, it was true, he would lose his temper and go up in a flaming rage, and he had been stupid enough to do this one day with a constable . . . the worst of all follies, for despite his proud theory of "hexemption from the Police Hact," Mr. Pikebarn knew very well that you should never, never argue with the *charferin-homa*, whose prerogative it was to do the speaking, and he enforced this truth upon his Co.-and-Co. with a wealth of angry Italo-English imagery.

Deodato accepted the reproof philosophically; his whole life now seemed to him a dream from which he lacked the will to arouse himself. Week after week crept by, and the vagabond life into which he was sinking deeper and deeper each day was carrying him no nearer to the solution of the riddles that had brought him to

England—the problems of who he was and what he was to become—indeed he was drifting further and further from their solution. His passionate desire to become a sculptor was receiving no fulfilment. It was a relief, no doubt, to be liberated from the smug and evil visions of the monumental sculptor's studio, and to replace them by the honest crudity of the puppets; but that was only a negative gain. He handled no carving-tool now except the knife with which he was sometimes allowed to repair Mr. Pikebarn's figures, and even then he was kept under strict watch by the showman lest he should depart from tradition.

He knew that he had let himself be washed into a backwater, but felt neither energy nor courage to strike a way out of it. The uncouth harshness of the land into which his destiny had cast him weighed like lead upon him, and his spirit sickened at the notion of trying to adapt himself again to its way of living. He clung to the little puppet-show as to a raft that bore with it a homely fragment of Italy. Pulcinella, Scaramuccia, they were his fellow-countrymen, exiles, and, like him, with their very names barbarised. In their company at least no questions were asked, no responsibilities undertaken. Life had sunk to an acceptance, and there were moments when acceptance brought a contemplative happiness of its own. At such moments he could identify himself, almost, with a green hedgerow, with the mighty plough-horses straining over a furrowed crest against the sky, with the lovely gypsy-girl, straighter than the brooms she was patiently trying to sell on the doorstep of a brown-brick crescent, with the joy of the children clapping their hands at Punch. Here was indeed the Dominion of Dreams—so long as he could bring himself to endure the suspense of all his aims and aspirations.

The trees round the villages yellowed, and autumnal mists began to hang about the corners of the city streets. In October a comet shaped like a sword of fire sprang into the sky and hovered over London at nights. "That's a portent o' war . . . of a bloody war to be fought somevheres soon," Mr. Pikebarn assured him. "I've camped with the *romany* in my times, and I know 'ow they read the stars. There's battle in that sign for some o' the nations o' the earth, believe me!"

Deodato raised a listless face in the nocturnal lane they were traversing, and the pale glow of the meteor flickered on it. What could it mean to him if there were war or peace among the peoples

of the earth? He did not belong to that vast movement of affairs. Pushing Punch's show along the by-roads of this outer island, he had no part or lot in the greater world beyond.

That night they sat together after supper in the ingle-nook of a tiny thatched ale-house near Golder's Green, while Mr. Pikebarn, in his own language, was "mending the *teearies*," stitching up rents in the puppets' apparel. Before the fire Toby lay reflecting profoundly with one small black eye open.

Suddenly Mr. Pikebarn chuckled and pointed with his needle to Punch, who was sitting beside him propped against the corner of the oak settle, his head hanging dejectedly and a weary limpness pervading his unsupported figure. Deodato looked up enquiringly from repainting Jack Ketch's black mask with the aid of a penny ink-bottle.

"Looks innercent, don't he?" asked Mr. Pikebarn, still rumbling with inner amusement. "Sometimes he looks that good and sad, the little ruffian, that I c'd almos' believe in him. He's jist a pore ol' man and not feelin' at all vell, and all these stories 'bout his killin' of his wife and cheild and bangin' the Beadle, he seems to say they're all jist tales put about by his enemies. He asks vy ve allus puts words into his mouth that he niver spoke? Sometimes d'you know he'd almos' kid me on as he don't condescend to defend hisself because he's too big a gentleman!"

Mr. Pikebarn gurgled with inner enjoyment, while Deodato smiled responsive to his good temper, but with little comprehension of the fantastic insular humour.

"Other times," pursued Mr. Pikebarn, stitching away as busily as Hood's sempstress, "he says as he can't help hisself. 'Whose fingers,' he asks, 'is it as moves me inside? Can I resist you, bein' vat I am?' Somethink in that p'raps, don't you think, Mike? I'm his sort o' destiny, rulin' him like the *romany* say that great noo star out there governs the destinies o' the nashuns o' the h' erth . . . I'm sure I dunno vat to think."

He laid down his needle for a moment, staring through the lattice panes opposite, white with the rays of the comet. Deodato rose and opened the window to peer out at the sword of fire, now hanging dazzlingly in the night blue above a line of elms in a field. He too wondered what it all could mean . . . the stars and destiny . . . the world's fate and his own . . . again he felt his banishment from the main-stream of life.

Mechanically making his answers to Punch against the railings of some square in Bloomsbury, or in some alley off Oxford Street, or in some stucco suburban terrace near Bayswater; banging the drum through the western and northern hamlets, Hammersmith or Kilburn or Dalston, that the monster was yearly creeping closer to with greedy tentacles, Deodato became gradually conscious that he was but one of a company of similar ghosts from the land of the sun. At a fair he saw with astonishment the figures of Arlecchino and Pantalone capering outside a booth for the amusement of smock-frocked English yokels; now and again his master stopped to talk in his peculiar jargon with bearded Italian organ-grinders, at whose monkeys Toby jealously barked; once or twice he ventured himself to exchange smiles with boys of his own people peddling trays of plaster busts. What offences, he wondered, were these exiles expiating here in the realm of rain and fog? What malign wizardry, too, he sometimes asked himself, had transported hither the Italian palaces of which he caught distant glimpses through chinks in the palisades of closely guarded parks, or the Roman church-cupolas that rose mirage-like through the smoke of the huddled City streets? . . . How bizarre this dream through which he passed with his own little group of banished Mediterranean sprites, speaking with his master, a bull-dog Englishman if ever one existed, a crippled dialect of his own language . . . How incredible this dream to which in the disarray and affliction of his spirits he clung as the only prophylactic against a homesickness that might have drained his life away.

Upon the fleeing skirts of autumn came winter in a burst of violence, winter black and terrifying, frost varying with nightmare fogs and icy rain, days that scarcely dawned in the pale glimmer of the metallic plate that aped the sun overhead before they faded in the raw purple twilight that had dogged all their brief hours at the end of each brick and mortar vista. Street audiences became rare and unwilling to linger; and although the Punch-men tried to defeat the long, dark evenings by turning their play into a "galanty-show," acted in shadow by candle-light behind a white cloth, the takings dwindled. Mr. Pikebarn muffled himself till he looked like a walking rag-bag; mittens hardly protected Deodato's blue fingers as he piped and drummed in the cold; Toby added a little plaid coat to his frill, and grumbled a good deal to Deodato as he trotted beside the frame, trying always to nestle inside his new

friend's jacket when they stopped for rest or food. Very few of the human beings they encountered, Deodato often thought, had personalities as marked as Toby's. He was at once coaxing and imperious; now sniffing life with zest, now disdaining it with tranquillity. It was impossible to imagine how he had acquired the artistry that enabled him to play his part in the drama of biting Punch's nose with flashing teeth and hackles rising, while at the same time his roving eye proclaimed his contemptuous detachment from all that nonsense. He was affection on four legs and philosophy in a frill.

"Seems to me like that Toby o' mine's got a noo master," grumbled Mr. Pikebarn good-humouredly one February morning as they squatted early munching their breakfast in a corner by the parapet of Blackfriars Bridge.

Deodato, who had been staring up, full of memories, at the dome of his own St. Peter's black-skinned sister, rising above the frozen sea of slate on Ludgate Hill, looked down and stroked the soft coat of the little creature coiled up for warmth on his knees. "I never would have believed," he murmured "that a beast could be a friend like this!"

"Oh, vell! a dawg's on'y a dawg, you know; I've had plenty," answered Mr. Pikebarn with good-natured indifference. "Come here, you, Toby!" and in prompt obedience Toby leapt down and stood looking up at him till he chose to throw him a bacon-rind.

Deodato peered over the parapet of the bridge, and watched with shuddering fascination a band of tattered creatures from the foreshore who were preparing to climb into the great sewer of the Fleet Ditch, the round entry of which was exposed at this hour above the river-mud, in search of their horrible harvest amid the spreading network of the London drains. . . . Here, too, he reflected, the ground of wealth and power was undermined; beneath the basements of the splendid houses prowled these half-starved human rodents, seeking dropped coins, nails, bones, all the refuse of the civilisation they were not allowed to share. Very different this submerged race from the happy-go-lucky Bohemians of the streets and roads! Everywhere in Europe they seemed to be stirring in their subterranean lairs, gnawing at the pillars of States, preparing what bloody surprises for the holders of power and comfort?

Deodato turned away, and plunged his chill fingers into the little dog's warm coat again. What had he to do with all that? He

lacked even the status of a rebel against society. He and his like had no more consistency or force than a handful of carnival confetti scattered upon the stones. And before him the irresponsible stones stretched out, stones of the city thoroughfares, stones of the country roads they would have to travel while spring slowly struggled again from her northern tomb and beckoned summer forward in shimmering green.

(3)

As suddenly as it had begun the dream ended. The heat and dust of July were stifling London again, and they were playing a pitch in Cumberland Market close to the back of the New Road. In the middle of the dialogue with Punch over the hero's impending execution Deodato saw Madeline staring fixedly at him over the heads of the children in the front row. It was such a shock that he forgot his cue and incurred a crimson-tinted remonstrance from Mr. Pikebarn through the frame. He pulled himself together, and as he blew up the pipes for Punch's dance he cursed his stupidity in not having tried to persuade his master to stay away from the neighbourhood of his old employment—though he felt that he would never have persuaded him to change his itinerary, for Mr. Pikebarn on all subjects whatever was the most obstinate man in the world.

Realising this, Deodato raised his eyes and glanced again at the girl in a silly hope that she might have failed to recognise him, for he had let his beard grow during his vagabondage. But he instantly saw recognition burning in her eyes, and their brilliance kindled his flesh anew after its long abstinence, so that he turned giddy with desire and confusion. He heard as through a mist the crack of the battling puppets' heads against the side of the frame, and the shrieks of the delighted children.

It was time to carry the bag round—useless to try to pass Madeline by, for Mr. Pikebarn would be watching relentlessly through the drapery while his hands manipulated the figures above. As soon as Deodato approached her with dry lips and constricted throat, she whispered to him, "I mus' speak to you, when you've finished. Father wants you: do you hear, father wants you dreadfully!" He could only nod and whisper, "Yes," as he bent down to take the children's farthings.

Mr. Pikebarn frowned when at the end of the pitch his Co.-and-Co. asked leave to take a little walk round the market with an "old friend." However he did not refuse, though he perched himself on the drum watching the couple where they paced up and down together in a far corner.

"Thank God, I've found you, Dayo!" Madeline was murmuring in her remembered husky voice that seemed to seek out every corner of his being. "How could you run away from me so cruel like that?"

Deodato struggled in the web. "You sent me away, Maddalena," he asserted; "you said cruel things to me. . . ."

"You shouldn't have believed them, silly! I was upset that night, nacherally!"

"And your mother . . . I was driven out by her. I am not enduring, Maddalena, to have evil things thought and said about your father and me!"

"Oh! Mother!" She shrugged her narrow shoulders in their black bodice. "Did you s'pose I believed that? I'd a' killed myself if I had! I know once mother gets an idea into her head it's dangerous," she shivered a little; "but still, you must come back, Dayo, you mus' come back to us. . . . to me."

"It is impossible I tell you, Maddalena!"

"Father is simply wretched without you. He's lost Toni, you know; Toni went away to the war."

"What war, Maddalena? Has there been a war? Where?"

"How should I know where? In Italy, I s'pose. He's Eyetalian, isn't he?"

"There has been war in Italy? Is it possible? Oh! but, of course, I know nothing, hear nothing, wandering about with Pulcinella! How mad I have been! War in Italy!"

"Don't keep on sayin' it in that silly way! I've told you! Sides, what can it matter to you, anyways? You got more important things to think of, Dayo. Father says Toni was the only man he could trust for fine work; Grimes he says is a blunderer and Wilkins reelly only a mason, besides he'll be off soon to marry the Widow Macarthy . . . how I hate her, smug, painted female, so stuck up about her glorious conquest!" Madeline looked weirdly vicious for a moment, and then resumed, "So if father wants you back, and you see he does, mother'll just have to put up with it."

"It would not be very nice for me!"

"And what about me without you?" She flooded suddenly into

tears under the funereal brim of her bonnet, and as once before a force greater than he could resist made Deodato put his arm round her waist to support her.

She looked at him with passion gleaming from her tear-drowned eyes. "You've not forgotten, I know!" she whispered. "Oh! Dayo, Dayo, we're goin' to be happy—again!"

Deodato took a step back, and pressed his hands to his eyes, like a man trying to dissipate an enchantment. "No! No!" he exclaimed, once again feeling that frantic sense of an invisible net enmeshing his freedom. "It can not be; I will not . . . I must not . . . see you any more, Maddalena!"

She gathered herself together, and shifted her market-basket in a business-like way to her other arm, "I shall tell father you are here," she said, "you can't say you won't see *him*!"

"Please, Maddalena, do not! It is useless!"

"Are you goin' to stay here all day? . . . Yes? . . . Fancy you brought down to this, Dayo! Goin' about with a wretched vagabone and a sinful theatre-show . . . But I am goin' to fetch father . . . at once!" and she ran from the market-place, leaving him in a turmoil of irresolution.

He and his master were just finishing their dinner, brought from a neighbouring public-house to eat within the shelter of Punch's frame, when Mr. Marsh appeared, shouting breathlessly to his former employee to, "Come here at once, d'ye hear?"

Mr. Pikebarn rose majestically, and desired him to take another tone with his "Co.-and-Co."

"Kin you speak to him, Guv'nor?" he said at length, after explanations offered. "Vy, yes, I can't see vat's a goin' to prewent you from speakin' to him. O'ny I warns you, fust that ve shows a long pitch vhen that theer church-clock strikes three, and my Co.-and-Co., if he is still my Co.-and-Co.—as got to be 'ere to perform his dooties; second, that no vun's agoin' to steal my Co.-and-Co. from me vithout my consent—and vithout makin' it good to me, if I choose to ask it."

"My good man—" said Mr. Marsh loftily.

"I don't know as I wants any compliments from you, Mister, and I'm not your *homa* for sutt'n sure . . . Who might you be anyvays? You looks like Jack Ketch the hangman, but from your per-hymntery manner you might be the b——y Beadle!"

"Now I want none o' your Elizabeth Lazenby, you know——" began the man of monuments, and then stopped as if his breathing worried him. Deodato at that moment noticed how ill he looked. He leant on a stick, which he had never carried before, and his face had a jaundiced, pinched look. "Please, please, Mr. Marsh," Deodato entreated him, "Mr. Pikebarn has been very good to me."

Both men seemed mollified by this, and Mr. Pikebarn, with a gracious wave of his pipe, signified that the interview might take place.

It proved at first a stormy one. Deodato brusquely rejected the suggestion that he should return. "Mrs. Marsh she does not like me," he kept repeating with obstinacy.

"Vell," riposted Mr. Marsh, "you needn't stop with us, then, like you did last time. Get diggin's vith Grimes or anywhere you like, and don't worry about the bees. I'll pay you extry wages. Come, Mike, old boy, you can't go on lowerin' yourself by livin' vith a Punch! You're an artist, a'n't you?"

"Artist I *will* be!" Deodato almost bellowed at him, "and that is why I will never, never, come back to your horrible studio!"

"God bless my soul!" said Mr. Marsh.

"That old man," Deodato pointed to Mr. Pikebarn, who was studying the cupola of the neighbouring church with a grim expression. "He is an artist—in his own way. He believes in what he does. Pulcinella, too, he is a little piece of art, humble, *popolare*, if you wish! I tell you, I would rather be making Pulcinella's face with this knife than all your terrible angels and fat children—in which you do not believe, Mr. Marsh!"

"Have you gone completely off your lump o' lead, boy?" enquired Marsh tenderly.

"Those are my thoughts," answered Deodato curtly, and despite the appeal of Mr. Marsh's haggard face, he made as if to rejoin the Punch-man.

"Wait! Wait!" Mr. Marsh clutched his sleeve. "Listen! You don't like the grand style! You don't like real sculpture! Werry vell! But if you come back to the studio, in the time that's your own, you know, you got the materials, you got the tools, you can model and carve . . . vell, your own funny ideas! Make faces all out o' shape, if you must, like that vun you left behind you! Could you do that travellin' about vith a disgustin' show? You don't want to make nothink but Punches all your life, I'm sure . . . Now,

there's an offer for you. I charge you nothink for your materials, and anythink you sell . . . if you *can* sell any of 'em . . . is your own money vithout a penny deducted. How's that ? ”

Deodato hesitated, twisting his fingers together. Marsh took him by the arm. “ I want you, old boy,” he pleaded. “ You can see for yourself I'm not the man I was. I don't know what's wrong with me, but I know I'm . . . lonely. I want some one to take a bit o' the load off me . . . to run about for me . . . I git so tired nowadays, and my food sorta turns against me.” He smacked his lips wryly, as though haunted by a bad taste.

“ You do look ill, Mr. Marsh,” said Deodato peering into the yellowish face.

“ Not ill ! ” answered Marsh shortly. “ Queer . . . Out o' sorts. . . . Bilious like . . . I jist *can't* keep my food down . . . But it 'ud do me more good than all the stuff in the doctor's shop to have you vith me again. And, believe me, I'm not the only vun at home as would like to see you back ! ”

They were standing as Marsh said this at the corner of an alley leading on to the market-place, and over Marsh's shoulder, Deodato saw Madeline in this alley stretching out her hands towards him, those thin white fingers whose burning touch had made him lose his head at the Alpine Cottage. He felt his head go dizzy again, and abruptly he yielded. “ I will come back, Mr. Marsh,” he said, “ if Mr. Pikebarn will give permission.”

“ Oh ! there won't be no trouble about that,” said Mr. Marsh jubilantly, and he walked over, leaning on his stick, to where the showman still stood smoking. Deodato feared the transfer would not be as easy as he seemed to think, for Mr. Pikebarn had a strong sense of property. But an unflattering surprise awaited him.

“ You vant to take him vith you ? ” asked Mr. Pikebarn at once, anticipating Mr. Marsh's request. “ Then you kin have him . . . now . . . and welcome ! ”

Not wanted again ! Deodato felt oddly and irrationally dashed, just as he had done when the *Padre Guardiano* let him go so lightly to another convent. Would nobody ever think him worth keeping then ? . . . Only Marsh ?

“ It isn't that I don't care for you, my boy ! ” said Mr. Pikebarn, pinching his arm affectionately, after indulging his little moment of malice. “ And I've enjoyed having you as my Co.-and-Co.—for a bit. But you won't niver make a Punch-man, and that's a fac' !

You see, sir," he turned to Marsh, "for vun thing his mind's never all on his job. I *vards* him through the curtains of the *slumarey* sometimes, a-starin' at the sky, a-starin' at the street, a-starin' at the people lookin' on. I thought at fust it was jist a case o' *vardrin'* the *donas* at the nursery vinders . . . but it's wuss'n nuss-maids. *Ultray cativa!* He's dreamin' all the time; I dunno about what, but it's *not* Punch!"

"I am sorry, Mr. Pikebarn," said Deodato. "But your show is called 'The Dominion of Dreams.'"

"Not that sort o' dreams, it don't mean, you kin take my word for it," said Mr. Pikebarn decidedly. "Still, *you* can't help it, lad! Same as I s'pose you can't help tryin' allus to do everythink a bit diff'rent. You plays the *pipares*, and I don't say you didn't pick 'em up wonderfully in a short time, but vith a turn and tune of your own. I cotched sight of you vunce a-dancin' to 'em . . . yes, *dancin'* at the same time as Punch, distracking attenshun from 'im . . . the lead of the show! I precious near told you to *scaparey* that werry minnit . . . but I some'ow couldn't. But ven I stopped yesterday at the York and Albany Arms, my rig'lar house o'call in these 'ere parts, I found a letter from old Chipsticke, who was my Co.-and-Co. four seasons gone, but then went back to the sword-swallerin' as he'd been trained in. Sumpthink, it seems, upset 'is innerds, fish-bone in 'is gullet, I fancy, and he's been in the 'orspital quite a time. Now he says he's discharged vell, and vill I take him back again."

"Then that's all right," interrupted Mr. Marsh. "It werry evidently won't break your raspberry tart to let Mike here go; and it'll be good for him. It's plain he don't suit *you*."

"That he don't!" asseverated Mr. Pikebarn, nettled again by Marsh's tone. "Vy, I'll have to get those figures he tried to carve for me re-done. Not a bit like Punch they a'n't, not a bit like it!"

"Ah! Mr. Pikebarn," said Deodato imitating Punch, "I am so sorry, you know, so sorry, so sorry!" and Mr. Pikebarn could not help smiling. "I am afraid," added Deodato, "I am all wrong because, you see, I am Italian."

"Mebbe that's it, my lad," assented the showman with sublime insularity. "It's sutt'nly not Punch. Never mind. Tip us your fist and good luck to you! The Devil's dead! remember."

With a grin of his purple face he ambled away towards his show, which stood forlorn in the opposite corner of the market-place.

Deodato, watching him go, felt a lump coming into his throat, and suddenly he heard a small whine at his feet. It was Toby, who had divined that he was losing his friend, and who was standing trembling and uttering sharp cries. His distress was pitiful to see. After Deodato had stooped with dim eyes to stroke him farewell, he ran back towards his master; then stopped and came crying again towards Deodato. "Come along, Mike!" urged Marsh, and at last Deodato fled, pursued by the little whimpering appeals. . . . So Toby, Toby's master, Pulcinella and his band passed abruptly out of Deodato's life as they had abruptly entered it.

(4)

Following Marsh to catch up with him in the New Road, Deodato was struck again by his enfeebled look. He hobbled, almost, on his stick; his features were sharp, his eyes sunk, and the protuberant lower lip, formerly so moist and luscious, now hung withered-looking and dry. Deodato put his arm through the old man's. "*Padrone*," he murmured, "you are looking very ill."

"Ah! don't *you* start now!" retorted Marsh irritably. "I'm not ill and I won't see Doctor Custer again. What can he do for me? Cut off my arm or leg? There a'n't nothink wrong with them. Give me a blue pill or a Gregory powder? I can dose myself as well as he can dose me. Mrs. Marsh she don't hold with doctors neither; not at all. She says their pills and drugs don't do me no good, and I certainly do 'ate the taste of them." He made that wry movement of his lips again.

"But, *Padrone*, you must do something!" urged Deodato.

"Oh! I know I feel queer . . . d——d queer, if it comes to that, and I can't under-cum-stumble it at all. P'raps it's Anno Domini . . . I didn't know what else it can be. But I keep throwin' my saint-and-sinner up. Mrs. Marsh she says it's mostly imagination . . . or else too much o' the Brian O'Linn."

"Do you think," hazarded Deodato, "that Mrs. Marsh is always right?"

"I didn't say so, did I? . . . There, I didn't mean to be snappy. I'm too glad to have you back, Mike . . . far too glad. Look here!" They had paused at the gate of the house among the unchanged, fatuous angels. "Be a good boy and run to the news-man's at the

corner for my *Police Gazette*. I don't feel like walkin' any further," he rubbed his black waistcoat with his hand. "Here's sixpence; be quick!"

Deodato ran off on the errand, feeling acute anxiety about his patron. He was not many minutes there and back; but when he returned to the monumental sculptor's gate Marsh had vanished. For a moment Deodato stood baffled; then he saw the upturned soles of a pair of boots confronting him between two sarcophagi, and realised with a shout that Marsh had fainted. He ran to lift him, and was struck by his ghastly look. His fingers kept opening and shutting convulsively. At the same moment the gate clanged, and Madeline, who had followed them home from the market, hurried up the path. He called her, "Maddalena! quick! Here is your father! He is very ill!"

Madeline swooped with her slovenly grace of movement upon the group, letting fall her shopping-basket, and scattering jade-green vegetables upon the soot of the path among the white, staring marbles. "Again!" she cried. "Father! Father!" and vainly tried to rouse him. "I don't know what's the matter with him," she sobbed to Deodato. "He's had attacks like this twice before."

"I will fetch water!" Deodato was rising from his knees, but Madeline checked him. "No! No! I'd better go. If mother sees you——" She dashed at the front-door and opened it with a key.

Before she returned Marsh, whose tight black cravat Deodato had managed to loosen, began to come round. "I'm allri'," he said thickly. "Jus' out o' sorts . . . Got the *Police Gazette*, Mike?"

"Lie still, *Padrone*!" said Deodato.

The next moment Madeline came running back with a thick tumbler of water in her hand. Behind her creaked Mrs. Marsh in her familiar maroon crinoline with its rows of black braiding. At sight of Deodato she stopped and glared as if she had seen a ghost. He fancied for a moment that she had even turned white; then her eyes and her whole form seemed to him to dilate more monstrously than they had ever done before. "Him again!" she shrilled, pointing a finger at Deodato. "I might a-guessed there was some wickedness afoot. Marsh, that creature's not a-comin' back to defile my house, I warn you!"

Marsh felt about with his hand and laid it on Deodato's sleeve. "My boy," he said in a gulping way, "is . . . a'comin' . . . back to me!"

Madeline intervened. "Can't you see, mother, father's very bad?"

"I told him if he goes on swillin' beer and sperrits, like a hog——"

"And there's a crowd gatherin' outside the gate now, look, mother! Let Mike just help me to bring father in . . . he don't mean to stay with us anyhow!"

A little abashed by the swarm of whispering and craning children that had clustered round the yard railings, drawn by the unusual spectacle of a respectable householder prostrate among his own tombs, Mrs. Marsh permitted Deodato to assist Madeline to carry her husband inside the front-door. Then Grimes was shouted for from the studio, and, after raising his eyebrows at the sight of Deodato, helped the two women to get Marsh upstairs to his bedroom.

Presently he came down to the front door again, where Deodato waited on the step, and told him, "The Guv'nor's come round. He says you're not to stop now, but to get a bed in my house. I daresay Mr. Jilkes can oblige you."

"But, Grimes, please tell me. What is the matter with Mr. Marsh?"

"How the devil should I know? He's precious queer, I know that." He hesitated a moment, and then said in a lower tone—"I can't think why in Evans' name they don't get a better doctor. That old Custer's no use. Nearly eighty I should think, and must be nearly blind by now. Why not call in a younger man?"

"They must!" said Deodato vehemently. "Anyone with eyes can see, Grimes, that the *Padrone* is very ill indeed. What do I know? Perhaps," he whispered with an apprehensive glance up the dim staircase, "perhaps he is dying."

"Oh! don't say that!" answered Grimes, shocked. "It can't be as bad as that, you know. But those two," he jerked his thumb over his shoulder, "are that obstinate . . . She's got into her head that alcohol is the curse, and root of all evil, and that if he could knock off the drink he'd be well again. He knows he's precious bad, and is afraid any doctor but that old dotard would tell him so . . . Also he won't give up his beer . . . He should have more courage, and look facts in the face . . . But when you say he's dying . . . no, I don't like to think that . . . I just don't like to."

Deodato shrugged his shoulders despairingly. "Then what is wrong with him?"

"I've told you I'm no fam'ly physician . . . One thing he tells

me is he's been sick after his dinner four times out o' five this last fortnight . . . Bad, isn't it? . . . I must get back to work now. I'm single-handed, Wilkins is takin' a week by the silvery sea . . . his last spree as a free man . . . I'll tell you anything more that happens this evening."

He shut the door, and Deodato remained for a minute staring at its blank, drab face, oppressed by a sense of riddling fatality.

CHAPTER NINE

A NIGHT AT THE OPERA

(I)

FOR two or three days Deodato worked in the studio, helping Grimes with an elaborate group; then late one afternoon a message was brought to him to go up to Mr. Marsh's bedroom.

For the first time he penetrated to those mysterious upper regions, and found them, after, all, perfectly commonplace. Mrs. Marsh met him at the top of the stair, and he thought he detected an air of scoffing triumph in the pale eyes, as she said to him, "Don't tire Marsh now with your foreign chattering! Else whatever comes'll be on *your* head!"

He found the poor *Padrone* lying weakly back on his pillows, a mist of grey bristles sprouting over his chin, his once fine head of silvery hair now poor, and bald in patches. He seemed a little better, though his face still looked pinched and hollow. The *Police Gazette* had fallen from his enfeebled fingers to the carpet.

"Yes," said Marsh, following Deodato's involuntary glance at the newspaper. "I done with crime, I think, Mike. It don't seem to interest me no more . . . Nothink does much now . . . I was glad to think I'd have you back smilin' and laughin' at me . . . Now, I feel it's too late, boy. I'm sorry . . . We shan't have no more of our jolly evenin's together, talkin' over the noos. Remember that night when we went through the carpet-bag murder, makin' a complete list o' the bits and pieces o' the yuman body they found on a pier o' London Bridge? That was *fun*, wasn't it? . . . Yes, I sometimes do wish crime had come a bit into my own life if you understand me . . . somethink to unravel and use my brain upon . . . But I know now it's too late to 'ope that. I'm about doo to be measured, and it's time I gave you and Grimes instructions about my own moniment."

"Ah! don't say that, *Padrone*!" Deodato leaned over the

bed and took up his wasted hand. "You will get better all right, and we will be merry again . . . over the murders . . . as we used to be!"

"What a fine strappin' feller you've become, Mike, since you first entered our studio." Marsh looked at him lovingly. "And with that beard o' yours too, now! You're enough to make a sick man feel vell, a'n't you? . . . If I could . . . If I could . . . But I dunno what's the matter with me . . . just that I feel queer . . . and can't keep my food down. But I didn't send for you to talk about me. I mean to do somethink for you."

"You are always too kind——"

"Little enough, dear boy, little enough! But I mean to make a small alteration in my Will in your favour."

"Oh! no! no!" protested Deodato in alarm, remembering Grimes's warning. "I wish nothing, *Padrone*! I have no claim on you. It would not be right. You have a wife and daughter."

"Step-daughter!" said Marsh, a little bitterly, "and precious little comfort she's ever been to me . . . though some'ow that gel has got a hold on me in spite of her queerness . . . or p'raps it's just that I've been sorry for her. But don't you fear they'll either of 'em suffer by what I mean to do for you. They'll have plenty still. . . . Now, listen! I keeps my Will in an inner drawer of my little front-office downstairs, and the key to that drawer I keeps locked in another drawer . . . up in the top o' that wardrobe you see over there. And the drawer in the wardrobe, again, can only be opened with this key I keeps on my watch-chain." He stretched out a hand to the bedside table where his gold watch and massive Albert chain lay. "Cunning, a'n't it?" he asked. "If any vun wants to git at that dockyment, they got fust to git at my watch-chain; then find that drawer over there; then find the private drawer o' my desk downstairs. That'd put a criminal, a forger or any vun like that, clean off the track, wouldn't it? . . . Vell, here's the chain with the key on it. Take a chair and stand on it, and you'll find the wardrobe drawer. . . . Don't make a noise about it. I don't want Mrs. Marsh to hear."

Deodato opened the wardrobe and climbed upon the chair. The key and chain jingled. Then in a moment, "There is no key inside the drawer, *Padrone*," said Deodato softly.

"No key!" exclaimed Marsh. "Are you sure, my boy?"

Deodato searched again, and even pulled the drawer right out. There was no key.

"That's werry queer," said Marsh. "No one could a' got at that drawer up there. The key's always been on my chain . . . on the table by the bed here, day and night, wakin' or sleepin' all the time I been ill like this. . . . And who's been here that could want to get at my Will?" He fidgeted with his hands on the bed-clothes, and then said in a worried voice, "Vell, it just means I can't make that little alteration just now. . . . Not till the key is found. . . . It must be somewhere about. . . . Likewise that drawer in my desk had the address in Paris that old Beaky told me to write to. . . . I wanted that, too. . . . I wonder if I can remember it."

"Do not worry about that just now, *Padrone*. It doesn't matter."

"Oh! but it does matter, Mike! Matters to *you*. . . . I want to write to Mossoo Charles about you . . . to that bank he told me of. . . . What was it, now? Somethink connected with Richmond, I r'lect. . . . What was it? Oh, yes, Maids of Honour. . . . I got it! Rue St. Honour. And the name I seem to recall was Lovat. . . . Lovat or Lovett. . . . Would that be a French name, d'you think?"

Deodato pondered. "Perhaps it was Lafitte?" he suggested.

"That's it! To the care of Laffit—Laffit or Lovett—Roo St. Honour. Now, Mike, pay attention! You'll stay by me, I know, so long as I can hold out. Then, ven I start on *my* journey, you'll start on yours—to Paris, with the letter I'll give you for Mossoo Charles. . . . Don't worry about the bees; I'll find that for you. . . . Annoying about that drawer, though, you know . . . prevents my puttin' my Will to rights for the moment. . . . Any'ow I lay Mossoo Charles rights you!"

"I don't understand, *Padrone*. Why should this French gentleman trouble about me?"

"Vy, jist because he is a gentleman, Mossoo Charles! 'Cos he knows I never asked him for a thing in return for what I done to preserve him from them rogues in the simmetry; and ven I ask him for something now, though it's not for myse'f, he'll not refuse me!"

"But what can he do, *Padrone*?"

"Solve this riddle of your hy-dentity, my boy! I'd a done it myse'f in time. . . . People can't keep their secrets from me. . . .

But ven I'm gone, who's to do it but Mossoo Charles? I told you he was as good as the detective perlice."

Deodato smiled at his fancifulness. "I hope you will live long, my kind friend," he said, "and that I shall not need to take that letter to Monsieur Charles."

"If I were to pull round . . . vich it a'n't at all likely," Marsh shook his head slowly, lying back on his pillow, "if I should, though, would you be content to live in London all your life. . . .p'raps marry here?" There was wistfulness in his tone.

"Live here for always! Ah! no, *Padrone*!" Deodato shivered. "This is a great city, but cruel and sunless . . . and I cannot understand the English."

"S'pose it should turn out as you was half English yourself, though. From what you said, Greeves as good as told you you're half an Englishman, though on the *bed sinister*. 'Scuse me using that expression, a bit indelicate, I always think it."

Deodato reflected. "I do not know. Sometimes I like the English. They are kind . . . and honest . . . and powerful. . . . But live for always in this London . . . ah! no! no!"

"Vell, maybe, I'll not detain you long, Mike." Marsh yawned and seemed to choke. "Throat sore!" he said. "Burns! . . . I'll try for forty vinks, I think . . . Even twenty would be a relief. I'll write that letter to-night, though; whatever happens!"

(2)

Deodato went downstairs and across to the studio with his mind in a tumult. Marsh's suggestion that he might go to Paris had been like a window opened on sunshine. Monsieur Charles or no Monsieur Charles, why had this idea of escape from England not come to him before? The idea that only in England could he solve the riddle of his identity must, he supposed, have become so fixed in him that, though the hope of success had long since expired, it was still a chain that bound him without his realizing it. But if the poor *Padrone* were to die, surely he might consider himself free! . . .

Was there no other bond then, to hold him fast in the impalpable grey quagmire of London existence? That was the further question he could not help asking himself as he scrambled down at dusk that

evening to the edge of the Regent Canal. He was going to an assignation, and his blood was already hot, his mind already confused with the power that Madeline exercised upon him. It was she who had appointed this risky rendezvous, and he had not had the strength to refuse it from the moment their lips had met again in the studio, whither she had stolen at a moment when he was alone, Grimes having gone across to give instructions to the masons in their workshop, the first afternoon after his return. Yet it was a mad peril the girl was running, to meet him here on reliance on her mother believing her story that she was going to hear a special sermon in the chapel . . . that insane chapel where, as far as Deodato could understand, she and her mother learnt nothing except that they were not to be held to account for any of their deeds so long as they had faith in their own peculiar "salvation." Yet he had lacked the courage to dissuade her. In fact, he confessed, as he waited under the slimy bridge, he had let his body be enslaved once more by this mysterious creature.

Irresolute, he watched the oily water drift past in sickly gleams shed from a paring of moon above the trees crowning the cliff-like bank opposite. From these thickets came again to his ears the homesick cry of parrots and other foreign fowl imprisoned in the Zoological Gardens. Clearly he saw the two courses open to him. On the one side opened the window of escape, back to the Continent, to a country where he would be at home, for French and Italian were but opposite sides of one medal. On the other side was resignation to his fetters, to the drug of Madeline's thin hands, her heavy, burning mouth, the acute enchantments of her lithe body caged in the garb of funereal respectability . . . all binding him, as if to this clammy, clayey earth which he was now digging with his toe, to London. Surely Madeline was the quintessence of London, embodying its mysteries, its haunted gloamings, its shuttered secrets so tantalizing to the fancy, its bursts of pleasure where the flesh ran riot, revealed only to those who knew its private paths.

Yes, London had its allurements, London which treated art with a whimsical cock of the brow, which lulled the questing spirit with warm fires, strong meats and stupefying drinks. If he wished—for he had understood Marsh's hint—he could marry Madeline and settle down with Marsh's money into this life which satisfied the senses so fiercely, which demanded only an outward gesture of respectability

and paid for that slight submission in heavy gold coins. He had heard those coins ringing on counters and into tills; there were no coins with that solid chink, he thought, in any other country. The money of London, massy, gleaming, satisfying, the actuality of the glinting symbol he had seen in the sky over the city on the morning of his arrival, so sterling a weight to be flung into the scale when souls were bargained for!

And when a few moments later Madeline came rustling through the bushes down the bank straight into his arms, and they drew together in the black corner beneath the bridge where their dark clothes concealed them from any eyes that might pass more than a yard away, then the lure and the temptation came upon him more overpoweringly than ever. . . .

"You'll never, never leave me again, will you?" her husky voice murmured in his ear. "You'll stay to be mine always, won't you, my . . . my . . . *thing*?" and suddenly she bit his lip till the blood came. "I shall marry you," she whispered, throwing back her head so that a glimmer of the moon, stealing under the arch, woke a spark in her black eyes, "I shall marry you!"

"What! When your mother will not allow me to enter her house!"

"That is all going to end," she said, with a sudden harshness. "Maybe we shall soon leave that house together . . . and for ever."

"Indeed? And how shall I support you, Maddalena? There is no fortune for me in carving tombstones!"

"Don't you trouble about the money either, my little bear! father's Will is goin' to set that right."

"No, Maddalena, no! I must not take his money. It would be unjust!"

"Don't talk stupid, my . . . thing! P'raps . . . if I tell him some-thing I know . . . p'raps we'll have it all."

"But your mother, Maddalena!"

Leaning for a moment out into the moonlight, Madeline threw back her head with that soundless laugh of hers. Then, flinging herself back into the shadow, she wound her arms, like slender steel, round his body, rubbing her face slowly up and down against his beard. Then she kissed his lips, and stood away from him, putting her bonnet back on her head. "I don't know what I'll do yet," she said, "But, anyway, I decide, mother shan't win this time!"

And as was her trick, she suddenly vanished from him, disappearing among the bushes on the sloping bank.

He did not try to follow her, but, wearied and confused, made his way slowly back to his lodgings through the ill-lit streets round the Park and Camden Town, beset by a feeling that the net was closing in upon him.

The next day Mr. Marsh seemed a little better. "That sleep I had done me a world o' good," he proclaimed almost gaily, to Deodato. "I'll be up to-morrow, see if I'm not! Then I'll git that drawer open, and see to my Will. I got almost an appetite this mornin', and I've asked Mrs. Marsh to make me some egg-flip for my saint-and-sinner!"

Deodato was so glad to see any signs of recovery, that he made no remonstrance against the allusion to the Will, and went over to the studio almost cheerfully.

But the day was not to pass without trouble after all. In the later afternoon, just as he and Grimes were thinking of knocking off work, Mrs. Marsh came creaking into the studio, a place she did not visit once in two months.

"You!" she squeaked, planting herself in front of Deodato, with her arms folded and her fat fingers tapping her elbows. "I've had enough of you. Comin' into this house again and interferin' with everything! Tryin' to persuade Marsh to get out of bed and start fiddlin' with drawers! . . . 'Ow much did he agree to pay you for this piece you're finishin'?"

Grimes paused in the washing of his hands, and listened.

"Mr. Marsh," stammered Deodato, "did not name any sum."

"Ask thirty shillings," put in Grimes. "You oughtn't to take less."

"And pray, who asked you to interfere, Mr. Grimes?" demanded Mrs. Marsh, shaking with passion.

"Someone's got to see this lad has his rights, Mrs. Marsh," boldly retorted Grimes. "And if you don't care for my plain speaking, well, find another sculptor to do what I do, at my wage!"

"His rights!" shrilled Mrs. Marsh. "You're great on his rights, a'n't you, Mr. Grimes? But what if his rights are other folk's wrongs?" She stopped, quivering all over like some monstrous, giant jelly. "But I wouldn't demean myself by argeying with a Popish wagabone from the streets that comes here to rob an honest

woman and her daughter . . . it's cheap to be free of him at his own price. Thirty shillin's he asked, and thirty shillin's he shall have." She fumbled under the apron she was wearing, and then flung the money at Deodato, so that the silver rolled over the floor. "Pick it up!" she screamed, "and then take yourself out o' the place! You're paid in full, Grimes is my witness, and don't you dare try again to worm your way into a clean woman's household or I *will* have the pleece onto you!"

As she stopped, panting, there was a sound of footsteps running across the yard, and Madeline burst open the door. "Run, someone, at once!" she gasped, "for Doctor Custer. . . . Father's terrible again, mother! . . . He's shiverin' like as if he was froze, and he keeps retchin' and can't stop himself!"

Grimes, who knew the doctor's address, ran off at once, and Deodato went out into the street to wait. He saw Grimes return in a cab with the doctor, an old man wearing heavy spectacles, who seemed to have difficulty in getting down at the door without feeling his way with his stick. Still, with his high black stock, dangling seals and carefully curled white hair, he made up in dignity what he might seem to lack in his faculties. He went inside with Grimes, and after about a quarter of an hour the latter came out alone.

"Still here?" he exclaimed, surprised at seeing Deodato. "Custer don't think it's more than acute biliousness. He says he's sick——"

"Mr. Marsh could tell *him* that!"

"And that his stomach's thoroughly upset. He's to have arrow-root, though he says he don't want to take it. Says anything he tries to take nowadays burns him inside. Poor old Guv'nor! I always knew he'd spoil his digestion in the end . . . drinkin' and irregular meals, you know."

"Oh!" groaned Deodato, "for the love of God, let us think of something else. We can do nothing to help him! . . . That old fool of a doctor! . . . Grimes, we must forget. We must amuse ourselves. But how . . . in London?"

"Sadler's Wells? Mrs. Pilkington in 'The Distressed Mother?'"

Deodato shuddered. "*Basta! Basta!* . . . I wish to hear music!"

"Better ask your friend Radico-what-is-it to give us orders for the Eyetalian Opera," suggested Grimes facetiously.

"Why not?" answered Deodato. "We shall find him most likely in the Opera Arcade. . . . Anyhow, we can drink something. Come along, Grimes!" and he dragged him off by the arm.

They were lucky enough to find Radicofani just emerging from a barber's shop in the arcade, and luckier still to find him in a condescending humour. Deodato introduced Grimes, and the singer agreed to accompany them to the oyster-shop in Leicester Square.

As they went along, Radicofani abruptly asked Deodato, "Have you heard from Toni Baccelli?"

"No," replied Deodato, "I have been away."

"Then you didn't know he lost a foot in the war, poor fellow?"

"The war!" exclaimed Deodato, waking up. "Ah, yes, the war! Tell me, where was it? What has happened? Is it over?"

The *basso* gaped at him. "You really wish to tell me, young man, that you have heard nothing of these events which have shaken all the Continent—*scusi, Signore!*" He apologised to a passer-by in Orange Street, whose hat he had knocked sideways in his spreading gesture. "You tell me you have not heard of the gr-r-and campaign for the liberation of our Italy from the Alps to the Adriatic that has been fought this summer by the gallant King Vittorio Emmanuele and his ally, the Emperor Napoleon——"

"For some dodge of his own!" interjected Grimes.

"You do not know the names of Magenta, of Melegnano, of Solferino, those superb victories?"

"They didn't see any newspapers where Mike was—er—travelling. Did they, old boy?" asked Grimes, with a giggle.

"*Stupefacente!*" declared Radico, entering the oyster-shop in the Square, and enveloping a small stool in a cascade of cloak and flesh. He seemed unable to proceed until refreshed by two dozen oysters at Deodato's expense.

"Well, then," he said at length, rousing himself, "I shall read you some of the letter I received from poor Toni. He tugged out a pocket-book, itself as fat as a small paunch, and fished in it for Toni's letter, scrawled in pencil on thin blue paper. "It is a noble document of Italian heroism!" he proclaimed in a voice like Big Ben's, which made the oyster-shells on all the customers' plates rattle. "Here," he turned over the leaves, "Toni tells of the glorious

victory of Solferino. 'We were opposed,' he slowly translated, 'to the full strength of the Austrian Army on the heights of San Martino near the shore of the great Lake; my old friend, the ground was thick with the whitecoats as if it had snowed for a week. For their part, the French, I will allow, did what they could to help us by amusing such of the enemy as were left round the tower of Solferino in the centre of the position.' "

"So, after all," interrupted Deodato dreamily, "Napoleon has struck a blow for the freedom of Italy! . . . I wonder what made him do it?"

"I know precious well!" insisted Grimes, scowling.

"*Chut, chut!* Listen!" thundered the *basso*. "'I had been in the reserve all the day'," he continued to read, "'and was not brought forward into the line with the other old soldiers of my age, Garibaldi's men, re-engaged Piedmontese veterans, and so forth, until the grand assault of the evening that was to seal the victory. At the very moment of our advance there swept up from the Lake such a storm of rain, hail and wind as blotted out the whole field of battle from our view; yes, it uprooted trees, unroofed cottages and blew over artillery waggons . . . for a half-hour neither side knew any enemy but the weather against which we were crouching for shelter. Then, as quickly as it had come, it was gone, and there was the Lake again, the cypresses on the hill, the roofs of San Martino, shining wet in the sun. At the same moment, *boum! boum!* came their guns from the crest . . . and there was I down with my right foot smashed to splinters. . . . I could see the bits of bone sticking out!' . . . Poor Toni!" commented Radico again, taking a prodigious draught of stout, and holding out his glass to be replenished by Deodato. "And so you see he could not take his part in the glorious charge that swept Kaiser Franz Josef's troops off the field . . . leaving the French to pursue the fugitives." Radico wiped his lips on his velvet cuff. "And Toni tells me he thinks he would have died out on the shore of the Lake that night if he had not been rescued and taken off the field in a lady's carriage . . . yes, a fine lady, *una Duchessa!*"

"Wife of an Eytalian grandee, d'you mean?" asked Grimes, his eyes rolling with sudden interest.

"No. The Italian wife of a French Duke, it seems. The Duke of Smolensk, who was commanding a cavalry brigade of the Imperial Guard, a great favourite at the Emperor's Court. His wife, it seems,

came on the field with her carriage full of bandages, wine, food, to help the wounded, almost before the battle was over. Ah! the good woman! A wonderful creature she was, according to the letter of Toni. *Adorable!*" Radico kissed his fat fingers enthusiastically. "But I will read you what Toni says of her." He fumbled with the creased pages, and at length read out, "'Hair like coils of solid gold, like the twisted pillars of King Solomon's tomb, and great brown eyes like agate stones' . . . a little the poet, eh? our Toni? And this is what he says, too, that the soldiers all believed she was not afraid to come upon the field before the firing had ceased, there and at Magenta, because she wear always round her neck a fragment of the True Cross," Radicofani reverently raised his flopping black hat, "which belong to her family."

"*Signore Dio!*" Deodato started forward, gripping the edge of the table round which they were sitting. "Tell me more . . . is there any more about her, Signore?"

"What is the matter, young man? You look what the English call, 'Seeing a ghost!' The strange thing, Toni tells in this same letter, is that her brother——"

"Ah! her brother!" ejaculated Deodato, shaking all over.

"Well, why should she not have a brother, my friend? Her brother, it was the talk of all the Garibaldians in the army, it seems, used to be a Red Republican, the disciple of Mazzini, yes, and"—Radicofani dropped his voice—"as they all believed, Orsini's fourth accomplice, who was never captured by the police. . . . Some say he was drowned in the Tiber, escaping from the *sbirri* of his Holiness. . . . *Ma . . . donna!* . . . what is the matter with that boy?"

Deodato had risen abruptly and gone to the window, where he stood with his forehead pressed against the steamy panes. He was not seeing them, or the dim figures in top-hats and bonnets passing along the pavement outside; he no longer heard the booming voice of the opera-singer, the sniggering replies of the greasy-haired journeyman sculptor, the clatter of knives and plates at the counter. . . . He was seeing again a dim baroque chapel, with the white rays of the dawn striking on a marble head of royal beauty, its heavy eye-lids half-closed, its mouth quivering in ecstasy. Something hard and defiant that had for more than a year oppressed him like a stone melted in his bosom, and his eyes brimmed over with tears. Through their gleaming veil he saw Ludovica, not now

as the statue, but in breathing flesh and blood; saw her in the velvet bonnet and purple gloves as she had appeared to him with her gold locks glinting at the end of Padre Egidio's Mass; saw her brown eyes softly glowing in the shadow of the wide, plumed riding-hat, as she bade him farewell under the archway in the campagna.

He understood now why she had never received his letters or answered them. She had gone to Paris to marry a French Duke! . . . The figure of this unknown husband remained shadowy in Deodato's consciousness. . . . He did not seem important at this moment. . . . All that mattered was that Ludovica had come back into his life. . . . Across the sea her form had risen again, had sent, without knowing it, an unspoken message to his soul here in this place of torment. When Deodato turned back from the smeared window, with its cabalistic label, BEST WHITSTABLE, spelt backward as seen from within, Grimes and Radicofani stared at his face in amazement.

"Are you in love?" asked the singer, with his forest of eyebrow lifted.

"Seen a pretty piece in the Square?" inquired Grimes, with a leer.

Deodato only smiled as he sat down again at the table. An immeasurable content, a dreamy relaxation lapped him round. Peacefully he listened to the violent political discussion that had been resumed between his two companions.

"You can say what you like," Grimes asserted. "Old Nap did nothing for the sake of your beautiful country. It was all part of his game? Why, it's as plain as the nose on your face, Mr. Radico! Bit by bit he means to make himself the master of Europe. That's what his fine phrases and speeches mean. That's the milk in the cokernut of his 'love for Italy'! We understand him in this country. Look at the way everyone's joining these here new Rifle Volunteer Corps. They'll be wanted, too! Some fine night we'll wake up and find Napoleon's landed in England. . . . Look here, if he really went to Italy to set it free, why has he left you in the lurch in the middle of the music? Tell me that!"

Radicofani made a glum grimace. "It is a sad surprise that he has made peace so suddenly—leaving Venice still in the hands of Austria, leaving all the middle of Italy, which he has sworn to liberate, still under its tyrants. It is true, Mr. Grimes, you never

know where you are with this Emperor. He is not a man, he is a mask. He has no weaknesses, he has no heart; no one knows what his thoughts, what his real purposes are. Not his Ministers, not the wife of his bosom . . . no, not even his mistress of the moment. He is, Mr. Grimes, the crowned Sphinx of Europe . . . But I think I can guess why he make peace so quickly with the Emperor of Austria just now, and bring home his army from Italy."

"Tell us then?"

"He was afraid of Prussia! Prussia was mobilising on the Rhine, to invade France if he went one step further . . . one leetle step!"

"Afraid of Prussia?" said Grimes contemptuously. "Prussia a'n't much to be afraid of, I shouldn't a' thought! Lot o' trombone-players and sausage-sellers. . . . We got our eye on him, and that's a thing he ought to take heed of, if he's any sense. He ought to remember Waterloo! Well," he yawned, "we shall see what we shall see. I think my friend here had a favour to ask of you, Mr. Radico." He winked at Deodato.

Deodato asked if Signor Radicofani could get them tickets of admission to the Opera this evening.

"This evening!" Radico waved his arms tragically. "You cannot do this, my friends! Come to me and ask for the passes, two hours, an hour and a half only, before the performance begins!" He glanced at the clock on the wall. "You should ask three or four days before!" He folded his arms and brooded.

"There is," he said at last, "one way by which I could get you passes—into the gallery only, right up there!" he pointed to the ceiling, "but you would have to work for it."

"Doing what?" asked Grimes curiously.

"Giving the *battuta di mani*!" Radico clapped his hands with a noise like a volley of musketry. "You join the claque—so! My colleague, Signor Buffalori," he puffed out his chest, "he who sings the *basso profondo* parts at the front of the stage, while I do the same at the back, Signor Buffalori he is very angry that Tedesco, the tenor, he get all the applause. He want a big claque all to himself, every time he come on and after every song!"

"All right!" assented Grimes. "You pass us in on the nod, and we'll wear out our hands all right!"

Since they were not supplied with a programme, Deodato never knew which opera it was that they listened to that night, sitting up in the gallery, wedged into the claque with a spectacled German student, two ex-waiters from Italian eating-houses in Soho, and a depressed-looking elderly gentleman who whispered to Deodato coming up the stairs, "I've played lead in my time in my own theatre, laddie; make no mistake about that!" Their leader, a knife-eyed South Italian, with a bandit's moustache and hat, threatened them savagely if they neglected to applaud; and from time to time Grimes at Signor Buffalori's appearance jogged Deodato in the ribs, whispering, "Clap you muff! clap! here comes the b——y Monument again."

In truth Deodato needed the reminder. He was sunk in a kind of trance, and did not seem aware of his surroundings. He had barely glanced down into the giddy abyss of gilding and red plush in the stalls, where the shimmering sea of women's evening gowns, with the minute flashes of their jewellery, was broken, as on scattered rocks, by the black coats of their male escorts. He had not looked up at the colossal gasolier glittering in the centre of the ceiling, which from its myriad jets sent out a furnace-like blast upon their faces here in the top gallery. Scarcely did he perceive the horseshoe of boxes, filled with white shoulders and waving fans, or the vast proscenium arch, with its classical doors on each side of the projecting "apron" of the stage. On the stage itself he was conscious only of vague shapes of dignity moving against the exquisite pictorial scenery of the period—groves, temples, blue seas, all the landscape of Italy itself.

And during the three hours that the performance lasted he seemed to be driving from his soul the gloom and uncouthness and menace of London, and to be bathing afresh in the sparkling air, in the rhythm and harmony of the Mediterranean world to which he truly belonged. Scarcely for a moment was Ludovica absent from his imagination; her envisioned shape had a reality and enchantment that dissolved into mist the spectacle of the stage. With luminous verity he saw that he had been but a fool in condemning himself so long to this bleak purgatory. What could he gain thereby that would recompense him for the loss of his life, which was passing away—so it seemed to his youth—amid scenes of ugliness and futility? Was there no better fate for him than to be added to the pathetic cortège of Italian exiles who, in dignified or humble ways,

were doomed to spend their days struggling to impart some touch of their native culture to this people of quaint, kindly barbarians. Architects, poets and musicians, harlequins, organ-grinders, puppet-players, teachers of the educated, entertainers of the vulgar, but for whom England would have had neither Shakespeare's plays, from which Grimes was always quoting, nor Milton's epic, known to Deodato through the pages of Chateaubriand's "*Génie du Christianisme*," nor St. Paul's Cathedral, nor Opera, nor Christmas pantomime, nor Punch and Judy; would have been deprived of three-quarters at least of all that lent enchantment to its grinding life of gain among the east winds and the fogs—would the islanders ever recognise the fulness of their debt to these?

They had laboured to bring the shadow of Italy to Albion. But need he, who had tasted the reality, linger among the shades? No. He would fly from London. From this spectre of a city, from the bad dream of the monumental sculptor's studio—from all this he would liberate himself. Marsh would surely lend him a pound or two if he asked; he would not insist on his staying to have his soul stifled. With the few shillings in his pocket he could at the worst make his own way over the continent, peddling drawings or statuettes, or dancing or making puppet shows.

Should he go back to Italy? No! *She* was in Paris. In Paris he might at least see her driving among the great ladies of the Court. . . . She might even speak to him again! Further than that his imagination could not at this moment reach. Escape! Escape! Every instrument in the great orchestra down there brought up this one word to his ears.

When he got back to his lodgings after the opera he found a note for him in the letter-box. It was from Madeline, and it said, "Please meet me in the Colosseum to-morrow evening at eight. Most important. There is something dreadful happening here. I don't know what to do. I want your advice, Dayo."

Deodato's first impulse was to tear this letter to shreds and make no answer to it. Coming straight from his vision of Ludovica in its setting of suavity and melody, owning her again as the Spirit enthroned over his soul and his longings, he felt a horrified repulsion from this prim hypocrite with her rapacious sensuality and narrow, spiteful mind. Out of his monastic past a term rose suddenly to his lips, "*Succuba*!" the name given in convents to the demons in female form that assault the chastity of the inmates' nights.

He hurled the word at Madeline, as though it were a missile that could slay her.

Then he decided that he would go to the assignation, to make a definite breach with her. He would not have her clinging round him, he shuddered at the thought, during the remainder of his stay in England, whether it were shorter or longer. "*Succuba!*" He had been assailed and defiled. But his soul had awoken again; he was done with that now.

CHAPTER TEN

TWO JOURNEYS COMMENCE

(I)

THE next morning Deodato made his simple preparations for leaving England the following day. He packed his small bundle of belongings, carefully counted the two or three pounds he possessed, and made enquiries at the railway about passages to France. All that was left for him to do, besides his meeting with Madeline in the evening, was to take farewell of his kind friend and patron, Mr. Marsh, and explain why he felt it impossible to wait and carry out the plan they had discussed together.

When, however, he called in the afternoon at the Marshes' house nobody opened the door to his ringing. He concluded that Grimes was out on business for the *Padrone*, and that Mrs. Marsh would not let him in. He turned away with a sigh, and spent the time until his assignation with Madeline wandering about the streets and the outer Circle of the Park.

At the time named by Madeline in her letter he passed under the huge colonnaded porch of the Colosseum and paid his shilling at the entry. For a few minutes he hung about in the hall at the top of the marble staircase leading down to the Gallery of Sculpture, waiting for Madeline; then he saw her passing the turnstile, prim and funereal as ever in her sombre dress. She passed him with a slight turn of her head but no look of recognition, and he understood that he was to follow her down the stairs. Through the crimson-draped sculpture gallery she passed, disdaining the thrill of the "ascending room" that carried visitors to the panorama overhead, and, rounding the curve of a dim glass corridor, led the way into a plaster representation of a stalactite cavern, lit by a blue glimmer through the roof. There had been one or two persons promenading the hall of sculpture, but here they were alone. On the brink of a sheet of tinted glass representing the subterranean

lake at the heart of the grotto, Madeline wheeled round and seized his hands in her black gloves. . . .

"Dayo," she gasped with the familiar hysterical catch in her voice, "I have somethin' terrible to tell you!" and began to sob.

Impatiently he pushed her hands away. He was resolved to be short with it. "I also have something to tell you, Maddalena," he said, "and it is better I speak first. It is no use for you to make an outcry . . . I understand you very well . . . and you me, by now, I think. What I have to say is this: it is time things were finished between us two. Understand? It is all over, Maddalena, between you and me!"

She took a step back and caught at the plaster rocks for support. Her face had gone blank, her mouth had sagged open. "What do you mean?" she whispered. "Dayo, you can't mean it? You're jokin'! Why, what have I done?"

"Done? You have done nothing, Maddalena! . . . Or, I should say," he took a few paces and came back again, "you have done what you wanted with me . . . and I also, I confess it, with you . . . But there can be no more . . . I am going away . . . away from England . . . I hope for ever!"

"Not jokin' reelly?" she whispered.

"No, before my God!" he rapped back brutally. "I hate you!"

She covered her face with her hands, and gave a pitiable moan. Then she looked at him, and understood.

"Tired of me already? Is that it?"

"Oh! no!" He clutched at the bunches of curls over his temples, pushing back his hat. "Not tired! But it should never have been . . . and anyway I am going!"

"You can't do that!" She set a waxen claw on the worn velvet of his sleeve. "You can't desert me like this! . . . You don't understand! . . . Why, you haven't even heard why I sent for you here! . . . Somethin' dreadful . . . Somethin' you must advise me about . . . I don't know what I ought to do. . . ." She burst out sobbing afresh, the tears streaming over her face. "It's too cruel," she moaned, "too cruel! Here am I in all this trouble . . . in this agony . . . I don't know where to turn . . . and you as ought to help me . . . yes, you ought, if you weren't a heartless villain . . . you turn on me like this! Without warnin'! . . .

Well, if you are goin' to act like a brute, I shall tell you nothin'. . . . Things must take their course . . . If you're goin' to desert me, too, I don't care what happens . . . I shall kill myself . . . or some one . . . yes, I shall, I tell you!"

Her voice was rising and he tried to soothe her. "Please, Madalena, please, do not talk nonsense! . . . Oh! I am sorry that I am giving you pain . . . But I cannot do otherwise . . . the *Signore Dio* is my witness!" He stamped on the floor of the grotto, and pressed his clenched fists upon his breasts.

"Who is she, then?" Madeline made one of her fluid movements towards him, so fierce that he stepped back as if a serpent were rearing at him. "Tell me! I want to know who she is! You are givin' me up for another woman, a'n't you? Don't try to lie to me! . . . After all I have done for you! . . . all I have given you! . . . Well, who is the little beast? . . . Some shopgirl, I s'pose?"

He put her from him disdainfully. "You cannot understand," he said.

With a tricky movement she wreathed her arms round him. "Dayo!" she whispered with her lips at his ear, "Dayo! Remember las' Monday down by the canal! Remember that evenin' in Ken Wood! Wasn't I good to you?"

"Oh! leave me! Will you? Leave me, miserable creature!" He repulsed her almost with violence. "When I say it is all over!"

She recoiled and drew herself up, her teeth biting into her lower lip. The artificial blue light filtering through the roof turned her face to a ghastly tinge. Standing in the middle of the cavern in her black bonnet and skimpy black shawl, she looked like a thin witch surrounded by her victims turned to pillars of stone. Her eyes burned savagely.

"She's not goin' to have you!" she grated through her teeth. "Understand that! I'm not goin' to let her have you . . . I don't care *what* I do . . . whoever she is, she shan't go off with you! Oh! you can laugh!" for he had shown his teeth in an involuntary smile of defiance. "Laugh! laugh! neither of you'll laugh long! . . . You thought, I suppose, you'd run away with her and live on father's money . . . makin' fun o' me when you wanted some joke to amuse you? . . . You'll see your mistake . . . you'll suffer . . . you'll suffer . . . you'll suffer!"

The grotto re-echoed her malignant sibilants as she rushed away, her soft cloth boots padding on the cemented floor. From all quarters of the gloomy cavern the words came back, as if each weird pillar, each stalagmite crawling down from the roof repeated them with its own intention. The frenzy of her anger had lent momentary reality to the theatrical terrors of the place. Deodato stood shaking and wiping his forehead, taunting himself with cowardice, but unable to stir. He longed to flee from these shrouded ghosts that were watching him, yet dared not issue from the grotto lest Madeline might be hovering somewhere in the obscure corridor outside. "*Succuba!*" he muttered hoarsely to himself again, and with a return to old mechanical habits made the sign of the cross to protect himself.

(2)

He woke the morning after with a glad sense of relief. To-day after a last effort to take farewell of Mr. Marsh he meant to start on his journey. But the post brought him a surprising letter. It was from Mrs. Marsh and told him that her poor husband, it was feared, could hardly last out another four and twenty hours; that he had earnestly wished to see Deodato once again; and that *whatever her private feelings* (underlined) she did not feel able in her heart to deny Marsh what might be "his last herthly request." Would Deodato, therefore, call at six this evening, when, if Dr. Custer was agreeable, he might see the poor sufferer.

Deodato sank down on the edge of his bed with a cold feeling round his heart. He had suspected all along that Marsh was dying; but to hear it stated as certain by his wife came as a cruel blow. Now for the first time he seemed fully to realise what a good friend the odd old man had been to him; how much he was losing in ways he could scarcely define by Marsh's passing. He found himself crying, and resolved to try somehow to show his gratitude to Marsh if he should find him still alive this evening.

And when, after waiting a long time in the pitiless cleanliness of Mrs. Marsh's parlour, he was allowed to go up with her to his friend's bedroom, he could not refrain from a cry of distress. The room was hot with flaring gas-jets, stuffy with the smell of invalid food and drugs, which struggled with a peculiar sickening stench that abated when Mrs. Marsh disappeared for a moment carrying away

a vessel under her apron. For a moment Deodato thought Marsh was dead, so still he lay, with closed eyes and hands outstretched upon the counterpane.

Soon, however, he perceived that Marsh's fingers were feebly making that clenching and unclenching motion, and in a minute or two his eyes opened. Deodato was appalled at the onrush of the disease in the short time since he had last visited the *Padrone*. Marsh's face seemed altogether to have fallen away, reducing him almost to a skull, a skull covered with a tightly-drawn yellow skin. His eyes were a fiery red, and there was a drugged look about them.

"Do you think he knows me?" whispered Deodato to Mrs. Marsh, who had returned to the sick-room.

"How can I say?" she squeaked back. "Dr. Custer prescribed opium pills for him this afternoon, and they done him some good by what appears. He's to have two more at sleeping-time. Acute inflammation of his bowels, Dr. Custer says, is what he's sufferin' from."

"Boy!" said Marsh in a sudden hoarse whisper, "come here! Go away, woman!" He closed his eyes again, and breathed with difficulty.

After a moment's pause Mrs. Marsh shrugged her fat shoulders and waddled out of the room.

"Is she gone, boy?" whispered Marsh to Deodato, who had knelt by the side of the pillow to catch his words, though his breathing was so foul as scarcely to be borne. "She has gone, *Padrone*," he answered Marsh in a low voice.

"Ah!" Marsh began to scrabble at the pillow-case. Deodato, thinking it was a kind of convulsion, took hold of the wasted hand to lay it down again.

"No! no!" Marsh resisted him. "Don't do that! Listen!" His head sank on the clammy pillow again. "Couldn't alter the Will . . . Couldn't find the key . . . But ne'er mind! All right! Got Grimes to bring paper . . . ink . . . while she was out shoppin'. Wrote few lines to Mossoo . . . and twenty pounds . . . notes . . . Grimes fetched 'em from the bank for me . . . All together, hidden in pillow . . . For *you*, unnerstand? . . . Feel for 'em yourself . . . yes, feel, feel!"

There was such agonised entreaty in the reddened eyes that Deodato obeyed, unbuttoning the pillow-case and feeling with his

fingers till he found the tiny slit in the binding of the cover which Marsh whispered was there, and drew out from among the feathers a small packet that crackled.

Marsh groaned with relief as he pocketed it with whispered thanks. "That's all ri', at last. Thought I'd die 'safternoon, writin' it all and waferin' it up . . . and makin' that hole vith my pen-knife. Now it's safe vith you, boy, I'm ready to go." He drew a shuddering, painful breath. "Want to go . . . had enough . . . Inflammation . . . drefful! . . . Custer ordered me given soup. Soon as I tasted it, I knew it had o'ny made me worse . . . Horrible sick. . . . And ever since, burning, all the way from here to here!" He raised his fingers to his mouth and passed them waveringly down his body, letting them fall at last like pale worms writhing on the coverlet. "Yesterday," he murmured, "I was that cold I couldn't stop shiverin'. To-day I'm burnin' . . . burnin' all over . . . Good-bye, dear boy . . . Mossoo Charles take care of you . . . Think I'm goin' to Hell, boy? . . . I a'n't been werry wicked, I think, but already I feel . . . like as if . . . I was . . . in the I-desire!"

His voice died mumbling away; he seemed to lose awareness, and for a long while Deodato sat by the bed, listening to his delirious muttering. He thought he must have sat there quite two hours when Mrs. Marsh creaked back into the room and said, "You better leave him to sleep now. He's to have two more o' them pills, and I'll give 'em to him."

Deodato stood back, and Mrs. Marsh seemed to him to loom enormous, as in all the bulk of her fat, maroon-clad body and crinoline, she stooped over the bed, blotting her husband from view, while her podgy fingers and wrist hovered over him seeking to administer the sedative pills.

There was a throttling noise; then some spasmodic breathing, growing gradually calmer, and Mrs. Marsh withdrew her formless body.

"He'll sleep now," she whispered to Deodato in an almost amicable way. "They do him good, them opium pills. You saw me give 'em, didn't you? And he's better already."

Marsh, indeed, turned upon his side, with his knees drawn up, seemed to be breathing more easily in his doze. Deodato knelt down beside the bed, and kissed the wasted hand. Then, defying Mrs. Marsh's prejudices, he murmured a short prayer and crossed

himself before getting up. But looking round, he saw that she was no longer in the room. He fumbled his way down the ill-lit staircase and found her waiting for him at the bottom, her arms folded and her fingers tapping her elbows in a characteristic gesture. Her face was crinkled into a melancholy smile, her voice creaked out almost wheedling.

"You must be tired," she said sympathetically, "and hungry, too. I'm just goin' to cook some supper for Maddy and myself. Stay and take a bite with us—won't you? . . . I expect," she added, noting his hesitation, "you're feelin' bitter against me, because you and me hasn't always been exactly friends in the past? But I had to look arter my own flesh and blood, a little, hadn't I? Anyway this a'n't no time for bad blood, with poor Marsh in that state upstairs . . . Come now, you look quite faint . . . Have some supper with us . . . and arterwards we can go up again together and see how the poor man is."

Deodato realised that for some reason she was anxious to have him by her during her husband's last hours. He could not think why, but he felt that he could not in decency refuse, little as he relished her company, and much less the prospect of encountering Madeline again. He had another seemingly endless wait in the tomblike parlour—he could not think how late it was—then Mrs. Marsh called him into the kitchen for supper. Madeline, her inky eyes dead, her face sullen, her teeth gnawing the middle of her lip, rose from a chair as he entered and shot him an indifferent glance. They all three sat down to table.

It was an awkward meal. No one appeared to have anything to say except Mrs. Marsh, who kept up a hushed monologue extolling her years of fidelity and affection for her husband, and her sleepless care for him ever since the beginning of his illness. "Here's this young gentleman, his friend," she murmured, as if confidentially addressing an invisible audience. "He can testify to what I done. He can see I'm wore to skin and bone almost, nussin' Marsh day and night. He could see upstairs that Marsh had the best of everythink—arrow-root, calf's-foot jelly, special pills for his inflammation—noth'n has been spared to get him well again—if Providence had been willin' . . . Nor, I didn't try to keep his friends away from him. He asked to see Mr. Mike-and-Angel, and I wrote for him to come at once. Here he is . . . and I o'ny wish as he'd been able to see my pore husband in a better state. But it was not to be

... or so at least it seems," she corrected herself piously, "God only knows . . . Won't you take anythink else, sir?" she asked Deodato.

"Some cheese?" suggested Madeline abruptly. It was the first time almost she had spoken, and in stammering embarrassment he thanked her and said yes.

"That cheese is stale, Maddy!" said Mrs. Marsh, frowning, as her daughter slouched towards the cupboard. Madeline appeared not to hear her. She stooped down to a lower shelf and was busy there for some seconds. Crockery clinked, and her mother looked up from the table-cloth, which she had been studying with edifying resignation. "What's the matter? Can't you find it?" she squeaked tartly.

Madeline stood up and came back to the table, carrying the cheese on a plate in one hand and in the other a little covered china pot.

"What's in there?" demanded Mrs. Marsh, as she set this on the table.

"Salt," jerked Madeline sulkily.

"Couldn't you see there was salt on the table, then?" Madeline raised her silky brows. "Is there? . . . Well, this is as good, I s'pose?" She cut a slice from the cheese, set it on a clean plate, opened the little salt-cellar and poured a spoonful on to the edge of the plate. Then she pushed it over to Deodato.

"Forgettin' your mother, a'n't you?" grumbled Mrs. Marsh.

"Didn't think you took cheese, mother." Madeline picked up the knife to cut another piece, and with her elbow spilt the contents of the little salt-cellar over the table-cloth and floor. "Careless!" she said, gazing languidly at the mess. "You can salt yours from the other cellar, mother."

Deodato paid little attention to this dialogue. His mind was full of his own gloomy thoughts as he touched the salt on his plate with a small piece of cheese and began slowly to munch the mouthful. It was gritty in the mouth, and had a kind of stinging taste. . . . Mrs. Marsh had said the cheese was perhaps mouldy; he decided to eat no more of it, and turned to listen to the resumption of Mrs. Marsh's monologue on her conjugal virtues. Madeline was sitting opposite him, regarding him dully from under her eyelashes, shivering with her black-fringed shawl drawn round her in spite of the heat of the summer night.

Suddenly Deodato felt a burning pain in his stomach and a throb

in his head. For a second his sight went misty, and he rose from the table, swaying a little.

"Feelin' faint?" enquired Mrs. Marsh. "Don't say as we're goin' to have you ill, too! Maddy, open the window a little bit more . . . let in some air!"

As Madeline moved slowly over to the window opening on the yard and pulled the sash up a few inches, Deodato stood clinging to the edge of the table, wondering if he had caught some infection in the sick-room. He saw Mrs. Marsh regarding him oddly, her eyes dilating, and, as he thought, with a touch of sudden fear in them.

The next moment his stomach, which seemed all on fire now, heaved violently, and muttering, "Excuse! I am ill!" he lurched to the door leading from the kitchen to the yard through the tiny scullery. In the scullery, however, he thought he was going to swoon, and turned to go back for help, clinging to the door-posts in the dark. In a monstrous swimming vision he then beheld in the gas-lighted kitchen Mrs. Marsh clutching the little salt-cellar and glowering at her daughter, Madeline leaning against the window and laughing soundlessly and defiantly at her mother. He swung about again; fell through the door into the yard; and collapsed upon the stones outside, retching with hideous convulsions. A church-bell struck one painfully and reverberatingly inside his very head.

For some minutes he could think of nothing but his pains and sickness; but the vomiting relieved him, though leaving him still with a burning stomach and a head that beat as if with hammer-strokes. He sat up, and clutching his dank hair, tried to understand what had happened to him. He recalled the picture of the two women furiously confronting each other . . . Mrs. Marsh's look of fear a few moments sooner when he had first been taken bad . . . the gritty taste on the morsel of cheese he had swallowed.

Like a sinister lightning-flash, suspicion . . . certainty . . . throbbed across his splitting head. *Poison!* The thought no sooner formed itself than his mind became crowded with tales of poisoning from his own country, from the days of the Borgias and the *acqua tofana* to stories of the Trastevere in his own lifetime. Doubt disappeared, and a clammy sweat poured out of all his pores, making him feel as if he had plunged into an icy pond, but aiding, like the sickness, in his recovery. . . . He remembered

what Mr. Marsh himself had told him of the white powders that carried death . . . arsenic, purchased from chemists as the means to kill rats, or even as a cosmetic. . . . The salt-cellar! . . . it was Madeline who had done it, Madeline who had tried to kill him!

He tottered across the yard, seeking to get water from the pump, and as he did so a second revelation burst upon him. This was Marsh's disease . . . burning, retching! . . . They were killing the *Padrone* with poison, too! But which of them had done that? The mother, surely, not the daughter! Did they work together . . . or had Madeline defied Mrs. Marsh when she had administered the deadly particles to him in the salt-cellar? His brain spun round. . . . What was he to do? Who could he go to for help? . . . And, *Signore Dio!* what were those two she-devils doing now? . . . He turned a terrified gaze backwards towards the house; the blind of the kitchen was still drawn, all was quiet. . . . He laid his fingers on the handle of the pump, and stopped. Its creaking would tell them he was in the yard and alive . . . what if they should come after him in his enfeebled condition to finish him off? . . . Did they think him dead already? Some time they must come to look for him.

As if his thoughts had reached them, he saw with terror the blind of the kitchen window slowly rise, and the vast, shapeless bulk of Mrs. Marsh appear against the light, leaning out and peering. With chattering teeth he bent down behind the pump, for fear she might see him in spite of the dark. He was utterly un-nerved, and crouched as helpless as a rabbit under those eyes, which he could feel without seeing them, turning left and right, trying to pierce the night. For a second the idea came to him of shrieking to alarm the neighbours in the houses round; but a foreigner's panic of their disbelieving him and taking sides with Mrs. Marsh, dried the cry in his throat.

No. He must get away, escape without a sound. Over the wall that ran along the alley parting the yard from the mason's workshop . . . if he could muster strength to scramble over! . . . He must do it, if he fainted in the effort . . . and found himself, almost as he resolved on the attempt, swinging by his middle on the top and looking down into the alley . . . he knew not how he had arrived there. Racking pains ran through him as he kicked his legs over and fell heavily on his back upon the stones. On hands and knees he crawled, moaning, a little way up the alley; then to his left there opened up, blacker than the alley in the star-light, the mouth

of a narrow passage running behind the masons' work-room. Into this he crept, as far as his strength would take him, and there swooned away upon his face.

(3)

Twice, it seemed to him in later memory, he awoke during the brief remainder of the summer night. Once to have a final fit of empty retching, which convinced him he had cleared his stomach of the worst of the perilous stuff; once, so he fancied, to see the glowing ring of a bull's-eye lantern probing the darkness of the passage; but if this were real and not a dream the ray did not discover him. Utterly exhausted, he fell off to sleep once more, and did not wake until he opened his eyes upon an overcast dawn, threatening rain.

He sat up, stiff and bruised, upon the stones, and with his head in his hands tried to piece together the nightmare story that had culminated yesterday.

Now Madeline's strange hints down by the canal revealed their meaning to him. She must have known or guessed that her step-father was being poisoned by her mother—poisoned to prevent him changing his Will in Deodato's favour. She had planned, it now seemed likely to him, to intervene and to hold the threat of exposure over her mother, so as to secure her marriage with Deodato and the certainty of the inheritance. . . . And it was he, alas, yes, it was he who had sealed the doom of the *Padrone* when he had so brusquely cast Madeline from him in the grotto of the Colosseum! She had allowed the last doses to be administered to her step-father, to deprive Deodato of any prospect of the legacy . . . and then . . . yes, it became clear . . . in her hysterical frenzy she had when she heard Deodato was staying to supper, purloined some of the powder, which her mother kept, no doubt, in a secret place, and unknown to Mrs. Marsh, had given it to him with his cheese. A mad act, doubling the risk of discovery, and depriving Mrs. Marsh of one whom she meant to use as a witness of her devotion to her husband in his last hours!

His last hours! But was it then certainly too late? Could not Marsh yet be saved, if Deodato was prompt? What should he do? Who should he carry his tale to? . . .

While he hesitated, he heard the cry of a milkman coming up the alley towards the passage where he lay. In a moment the man appeared in his white smock, with his two pails swinging from a yoke across his shoulders. His eye fell upon Deodato and he stopped. "Anyfink wrong, my covey?" he enquired.

Deodato shook his head, with an effort at a smile.

"Jist makin' a night of it?" The milkman grinned; then, seeming to recognise Deodato, "Didn't you use to work down there on the statters?" he enquired, jerking a thumb over his shoulder? "Yes? I thought so. . . . You know it's all up vith the old gemman?"

"All up?"

"Musta died in the night. All the blinds is drawn close at the house this mornin', and a bit o' crape tied on to the door-knocker. Vell, he's set up plenty in memorials, and he deserves a fine monniment hisself at stock-price, don't he? Must a' left a tidy bit to his vidder, and that queer gel of hers. Good-mornin' . . . *Milk . . . oop!*" He yodelled his way up the alley to the street at the back.

With a desolate heart and a sick head Deodato crept round into the New Road, and clinging to the rails in front of the serried statues, looked up at the house. It was true. There was nothing he could do now. The blinds were down, giving the place a secretive, sanctimonious look, like that he had seen on the faces of the mutes at the funeral in Connaught Place. Overhead the sick dawn revealed a steel-grey sky, dulled by the early morning smoke of countless chimneys. In after years this vision of London was to come back to Deodato more often than any of its wealthy panoramas of park or pillared square or glittering shop-front. This was his essential London, grey and sad, with the threatening sky, the charcoal smudges of the smoke scoring it with wavering lines, the silent ranks of the chimney-pots—and now another chimney-pot coming slowly down the opposite pavement, a policeman's hat above his dead-blue coat and clumping boots.

Should he hobble across the street, stop the *guardia*, and denounce the two silent murderesses within there? . . . To what purpose? It would not bring the poor *Padrone* back to life. Where was the sense in getting mixed up with the police in a foreign land? Who could tell what they would do to him before the end of it—at the least delay his escape to Paris for months. No, let him remember

Mr. Pikebarn's advice ; let the *charferin homa* go on his way ; he could do nothing to help now.

Deliberately the peeler passed on his beat ; already he was crossing Park Crescent on his way towards Marylebone Church. Deodato felt the crackling Bank of England notes in his breast-pocket ; then took a last look at the fishy-eyed angels, streaked with grime, at the house of sordid mysteries, its mouth tied up and gagged with crape. . . . And turned his back for ever on that scene.

END OF BOOK TWO



BOOK III

Imperial

“ Partant pour la Syrie,
Le beau et jeune Dunois . . .”
Anthem of the Empire.

CHAPTER ONE

MONSIEUR CHARLES

(I)

DEODATO woke on the wooden seat of the third-class carriage that had been carrying him through the night from Dieppe towards Paris, and, raising the blind, let in the happy sunshine. The train was not full, and he had the compartment to himself, which had enabled him to sleep at full length. Despite the hard bench, this sleep seemed to him to have completed his cure.

He had lain on his bed all the preceding day in London, taking only a little milk. The crossing from Newhaven, luckily for him, had been a mill-pond passage, and a kindly doctor on the ship, to whom he happened to speak, had advised him to buy oranges if his stomach was upset. He had done this on the platform at Dieppe, and now felt only a healthy hunger, which did not impair his enjoyment of the sunshine and of the sky. This lacked the azure depth of the Italian heaven, but its gleaming blue with little white clouds asail in it had an entrancing splendour. Only a few hours travel, and how far he had come from the rainy smoke-veil in which he had left London ! This sky seemed to laugh, and the sun that sometimes dazzled his eyes appeared to be pouring down gold in spendthrift cascades upon the countryside.

Fields and woods alike were as carefully tended as a nobleman's pleasure-ground; sleek cattle fed in plentiful pastures; the gardens of the scarlet villas and the minute grey châteaux, with their steep, mansarded roofs and slate turrets, blazed with flowers; at the level-crossing barriers stood carts with drivers in clean blue smocks and market-women in white bonnets and spotless aprons. The suburban station of Asnières, as they puffed slowly through it, was filled with cheerfulness and bustle—troops of workmen in blouses, the station-master in gold-braided *képi*, with pince-nez and an imperial beard, two short soldiers in red pantaloons and snowy gaiters, on every hand alertness, zest and the air of prosperity. Then the view was

obscured as they passed a gliding mail-train, its dark-green waggons showing in the centre panel of each a golden eagle crowned by the initial "N."

A few minutes more, and they had crossed the Seine between woody banks lined with gay boat-houses, and a vista broke out beyond—an infinite expanse of new-looking houses glittering beneath the pale sky, with spires and towers breaking their contour. Almost immediately a tunnel swallowed up the train, which emerged between tall façades with rows of latticed shutters, drawing in like a canyon, and came to a standstill in the early morning scurry of the Embarcadère de l'Ouest.

Though barely eighteen months had passed, the young man who came out from the station into the Rue Saint-Lazare and stood gazing about him had changed greatly from the youth, naïve and sensitive despite the markings of suffering and hunger, who had disembarked at the stairs by St. Katherine's Dock in London. His short black beard and stiff moustaches gave him a look beyond his age. They hid the mouth, made tense in these days by harsh experience, though they did not conceal the now settled jut of the lower lip, due to habitual clenching of the jaws. The cheeks were hollow still, enforcing the suggestion of age; and in the thinness of lean living, intensified by recent indisposition, the eyes seemed larger than ever. They were blue-grey pools, now sombre and anguished, now lit up within by some brooding fire, now hard with a stony, almost cynical defiance.

At the moment, however, they were alive with pure pleasure as he stood on the kerb and watched the traffic—the cab-men in white hats and red waistcoats driving the *fiacres*, the enormous omnibuses with their towering *impériales* and throng of outside passengers clustered even round the driver, the pedestrian swarm in daringly swinging crinolines or in light-coloured or tartan trousers, the kiosks of coloured glass, the *sergent de ville* at the corner with his clanking sabre and cocked hat. The awnings of the cafés were already down, and the iron tables had a sprinkling of early customers. Deodato realised his hunger again, and in a side-street where a humbler café indicated rather than advertised its existence by a couple of ever-greens in pots, sat down to take coffee and bread.

While breakfasting he considered his plans. The banks, he supposed, would open in about an hour now, and no time must be lost in presenting at the house of Lafitte his credentials from

Mr. Marsh. . . . Mr. Marsh! How incredible it seemed that the poor *Padrone* now lying dead in his mean London villa amid his smirking statuary could have any influence upon a gentleman in this splendid, wealthy city! . . . Well, it would soon be shown whether the famous M. Charles was a myth, an illusion, a *farceur*, a secret agent . . . or, it was after all just possible, an eccentric French gentleman of substance, willing to do something for the friend of the man who had saved him from destruction—and asked nothing for it. Nevertheless the more one reflected upon that queer story of the cemetery the less credible it became.

Deodato spent the time until nine o'clock wandering agitatedly about the streets round Rue Saint-Honoré, and the moment the bank of Lafitte opened he passed trembling through the high, sculptured doors. His letter was accepted rather superciliously by a clerk behind a bronze-wreathed grill in the First Empire style, who, after a glance at the superscription, took it away to an inner apartment. In a few minutes out came a grey-haired gentleman in a high black stock, at whose passage all the clerks bowed. For the first time Deodato felt the leap of hope in his heart. For the first time M. Charles became a real personage. He must be of some importance if his correspondence was handled by such an authority.

The grey-haired gentleman put on pince-nez and stared for several moments at Deodato. But he showed no curiosity in words. He simply said, "You will be so good as to leave your address in Paris with me. . . . You have not yet an address? . . . Well, so soon as your residence is fixed. Leave a plain direction, so that you may be found at once in the event of your being wanted. Good day." He turned and walked back through the bowing clerks to his sanctum. There on the threshold he paused a moment, and looked keenly again across the lofty room at Deodato, before withdrawing.

This interview had done nothing to dispel the mystery, thought the latter disappointedly, as he left the bank. He did not know what to do next, and resumed his aimless strolling about the by-streets. Suddenly the sunshine and the laughing sky broke upon his depressed musings in a wide sweep, and he found himself on the edge of the Place de la Concorde.

For a minute or two his eye could not master the turmoil of his impressions. He had never seen the like of this before—the immense square, with the obelisk rising in its centre, crowded with vehicles, cabs, private carriages, waggons; the fountains; the groups of

marble horses seeking in the pride of life and energy to break from the hold of their stone attendants ; on the further side, across the bridge leading over the river, the gold-flecked dome of the Invalides, sparkling amid a confusion of roofs and balconies. He turned his head to the left, and beheld beyond a green garden the long façade of a palace in the Renaissance style, with conical, sculptured pavilions at either end and a flattish, four-sided cupola in the centre. Above this cupola hung the tricolour of France, with its curious celestial effect of white and blue against the trumpet-call of red, and on the top of the flag-staff shone a golden eagle. Gathering up his scrappy knowledge of Paris, Deodato identified this building with awe as the Palace of the Tuileries, the residence of the Emperor.

He turned the other way now, and there opened to his gaze a fourfold avenue of trees, divided by lawns, down the centre of which moved an endless line of carriages, a ceaseless cavalcade of equestrians in glossy silk hats and equestriennes in billowing skirts. The sun gleamed on the silver of axle-boxes, the polished steel of bits, the brass monograms on horses' blinkers, waking a stream of sparks that darted all down the avenue to where far away—catching Deodato's breath—there rose a triumphal arch, similar in design to those he had known in Rome, but dwarfing them all by its immensity. Flaming like a white beacon in the sun, it enclosed in its gigantic aperture a second vista of sky and trees, subdued by distance, impalpable as some heavenly country remote from common earth and accessible, it seemed, by this victorious portal to the people of Paris and to them alone.

Deodato felt his heart beating, his blood whipped to a tumult. He did not know how to dominate the excitement unleashed in him by this first vision of the Champs-Élysées and the Arc de Triomphe. He felt stifled by his own insignificance amid this bustling life. And yet, as he turned about to drink in once again the marvellous picture, he felt an affinity, almost a familiarity, with it. And suddenly the truth flashed over him. The wind-swept exhilaration of the statued groups, the fountains shimmering and breaking their brilliance as the light breeze made their columns tremble, the ornate, pillared palace, the mighty Roman arch in the distance—all this prolonged the grandest traditions of Italian baroque ; it sprang from the same inspiration as the genius of Bernini himself. And immediately the face and form of Ludovica sprang into his imagination, supplying a centre to the great fresco, a meaning to the sumptuous pageant.

She was in place here ! At home here ! The Tuileries, the sculpture-crowned Place, the majestic foliage of the Champs-Élysées, these were the fit settings to her magnificence. . . .

A trampling of hoofs, a jingle of accoutrements interrupted his reverie. Up the Avenue came a half-squadron of mounted soldiers of an incredible, a fantastic magnificence. They wore helmets gilt with the Imperial monogram, cuirasses of steel burnished like mirrors, sky-blue tunics, white gauntlets and long, winged jack-boots. The *guidon* borne by the trumpeter before them was worked in resplendent silks. Their impassive faces showed imperials and fierce moustaches, and they seemed, as they went by at the slow walk of their heavy chargers, to be armoured statues rather than men, an escort fitter for Mars himself than for any fleshly sovereign. Glittering and glinting, the Cent-Gardes of the Emperor wound their way across the Place, going towards the Tuileries. They seemed to set upon the triumph of the scene a culminating note of menace.

(2)

Anxious days followed for Deodato. After leaving the Place de la Concorde, he had wandered eastwards past the Tuileries, past the adjoining Louvre lately united by the Emperor Napoleon with new buildings to his own palace, and at last in a small street beyond the column of the Bastille he had hired a room for himself above a small *estaminet* where carters and cabmen went to eat, and hastened to communicate this humble address to the bank. But days passed and then weeks without any response, and Deodato's hope began to dwindle, together with his small hoard of money.

Yet his anxiety for his future could not wholly dull the zest with which on his daily ramblings to kill time he studied the spectacle of Paris. It had for him the exhilaration of complete novelty. Rome, wrapped in its sacred meditation, with the grass growing between the crevices of its stones, dour London, with its riches only to be glimpsed as it were through crevices in the strong-boxes of brick and stone that safeguarded them, had in no way prepared him for this imperial capital, lit by a sun that sparkled diamond-like through a sky of white and faint-blue muslin. They had shown him nothing like Haussmann's endless, straight boulevards, thronged with prosperous crowds and luxurious equipages, splashed with the colour of military uniforms, lined with shops of a size and

magnificence that he had never dreamed of, surpassing those of Regent Street and Bond Street; nothing like the grace of the mansions round the Champs-Élysées, clad, like elegant women too well-bred to be demonstrative, in harmonies of pale and dark grey; nothing like these carefully planned vistas, each leading the eye, as in a grandiose stage-scene, to some statue-crowned column, dome or spire, some church or Ministry or public building—the flamboyant Gothic Hotel de Ville, the twin-towers of Notre-Dame, stubbornly medieval in their grey austerity while the modern city clanged and roared about them, the narrow, scintillating river, with its stately quays and frequent stone bridges.

Everywhere he found the same gesture of abundant vitality. Here was life and wealth, not seeking to conceal itself under the cloak of miserliness and puritanism, but flaunting its strength in public expenditure and proud display. For days there rang in Deodato's ears the acclamations that greeted the march past of the troops returned from the Italian campaign, a ceremony which took place some three weeks after his arrival in Paris, and to which he was not able to get any nearer than the extreme fringe of the crowd boiling on the Place Vendôme and its approaches.

And still no news had come to him from the House of Lafitte. It was becoming a fight now against the qualms of his heart; and to quiet them by the diversion of a fresh scene, he resolved the next morning to climb to the pinnacle of Montmartre, still a semi-rural village, with windmills lifting their arms above its roofs, and its little winding streets broken by thistle-grown slopes and the scars of ancient quarries. From the waste land that made a bare crown for the hill all Paris could be seen, spread on its plain beneath the pallor of its misted sky. Grey and dim yellow in mass, with the blue of its roofs culminating to the west in the rich tint of the Louvre and Tuileries towers; with its array of cupolas, centring in the grand dome of the Pantheon, its classic belfries and Gothic steeples; with the green heights of Père-Lachaise cemetery rising, flecked by a white pyramid, in the east, it stretched away, flat beneath its gauze of humidity and smoke, to the indistinctness of the Meudon hills on the horizon.

At Deodato's back, as he stood contemplating, was the venerable village church of Saint-Pierre with its square tower and wooden telegraph, and next to it the drowsing Place du Tertre, with a café

spreading a striped awning, and two or three peaceful citizens chatting and reading papers, quite as if in the province, while they sipped their *aperitifs*. But it was down in Paris that Deodato's soul was held, there that he longed to be fighting for his place, sharing the sweep and onrush of that magnificent life. He could hardly give his back to the view.

Before he returned, he roved round the walled lanes that occupied the slopes to the summit, and paused fascinated before an empty villa, standing tranquil in its own garden, and bearing on its gate the name *Château des Zéphirs*. Dilapidated as it was, it had a sort of quaint homeliness, with its mock-classical pediment, wrought metal balconies, fluted stone urns on the gate-pillars, and similar signs of the eighteenth-century "folly." Deodato prowled round the garden walls, and saw over their tops that some later tenant had built on a stone-pillared conservatory or belvedere, with stairs descending from it through a door in the wall into an abandoned sand-quarry. What a studio that would make, he dreamed, and from that window at the other angle of the house, what a view of Paris!

Paris! The glimpse he could get from the cobbled lane in which he stood drove the miniature "*Château*" out of his head. He was not interested now in shady retreats, but in the monster down below there with which he must wrestle. Was it an insane ambition, he asked himself, as the roar of the city rose to meet him on his descent?

(3)

He turned wearily in at the *estaminet* after his long walk, and was passing upstairs to his room when the landlady called to him from her *comptoir*. "A letter for you, Monsieur!" she cried. "Brought this morning by a servant . . . a gentleman's servant, I am sure."

A gentleman's servant! Deodato leaped back at a bound down the two or three stairs he had mounted, and almost snatched the letter, apologising as he did so with a smile of his white teeth. The envelope was of a strong, fine texture, which resisted his fingers as he ripped it open . . . obviously expensive. The letter inside bore no crest, no address. It simply stated in a hand of elegant formality that "The bearer of a communication from M. Marsh of London

addressed to the care of the house of Lafitte is imperatively desired to be at his apartment to-night at ten to receive a visitor on behalf of M. Charles."

Deodato's heart throbbed; he felt unable to contain his excitement. "Have you made your fortune, Monsieur?" slyly inquired the landlady, an attractive brunette, scarcely middle-aged.

"I believe so!" Scarcely knowing what he was doing, Deodato bent over the *comptoir* and kissed her, to the confusion of her dark curls.

"*Oh! là! là!*" she protested, "and my husband, young man?"

"He is a very lucky husband . . . and I am very lucky, too!" cried Deodato, as he ran up to his bedroom singing and pursued by the laughter of Madame.

An endless afternoon, an endless evening dragged past, and Deodato was almost overcome by the strain of anticipation as he sat on his bed by the light of a single candle on the wash-stand, wondering for the hundredth time where he should ask his visitor to sit, for there was no chair in the room, and the landlord had gruffly refused to lend him one for the evening. He was perilously near drowsing from nervous exhaustion when the door was flung open without a knock by a tall old gentleman with a long, inquisitive nose and the most distrustful tiny black eyes, sharper even than the old Count Santacroce's, that Deodato had ever seen. This stranger was clearly visible in the rays of the candle on the wash-stand near the door, but the room and its occupant were not so plain to him. He turned back to the doorway, outside which the landlord was now obsequiously bowing. "More light!" he ordered in a thin, sharp voice. "Bring a lamp there! One will at least see whom one has to deal with!"

The landlord went scurrying for a lamp, leaving the stranger alone with Deodato. "What is your name?" he asked abruptly.

"Deodato, Monsieur," was the answer, in a choked voice.

"That is a *prénom*. I said your name!" snapped the old gentleman, though a cynical smile playing round his prolonged knife-cut of a mouth took the edge a little off his peremptoriness.

"I have no other name, Monsieur," Deodato told him.

"That's very curious!" Suspicion gleamed in the black pin-points again. "Italian? . . . You had better tell me the truth!"

"But certainly, Monsieur. I was born, I believe, in Rome."

The visitor switched the conversation over to Italian as if he

desired to test Deodato's truthfulness. "You have no parents? No relatives of any kind?" he inquired. "But, do you know, that is not at all satisfactory, my friend?"

At that moment the landlord returned with a lamp which filled the room with a pinkish brilliance from its gaudy glass shade.

"Hold it up well!" rapped the authoritative old gentleman. "Now let me look at you, young man!" He seized Deodato by the lapels of his coat, and seemed to stab him with his eyes. For all his innocence, Deodato felt himself colouring under this suspicious scrutiny. His visitor at length released him with a grunt. "There is nothing against your face, at any rate!" he said. "Now, permit me!"

Before Deodato could object he had begun to slap him lightly all over the body, feeling the outlines of his pockets and squeezing him round the waist.

"Please, Signore——" objected the victim.

"*Zitto!*" retorted the other. "Be quiet! If you refuse to be searched, then you will not be taken . . . where you are lucky to go. It is my last word."

Deodato submitted in silence to the completion of the search.

"Good," said the visitor. "Now, *avanti!* The carriage waits below."

A sudden panic threw Deodato into a sweat. "But who are you?" he asked. "Where are you taking me? Why does this man," pointing to the landlord, whose hand holding the lamp was shaking, "show such fear? Are you the police? What have I done?"

The old gentleman stuck a monocle in his eye and stared at him. "Too many questions!" he said, returning to French. "Your part is to come with me. *En route, mon garçon!*" He struck him on the shoulder, propelling him towards the door.

Deodato was about to resist when he saw the landlord signalling to him with a vehement shake of his head. "I will come," he said, after a second's further hesitation.

"*A la bonne heure!*" replied his conductor, with the cynical smile again playing round his lips. "Now, enough time lost! March!"

Deodato went before him down the stairs, and was relieved that the strange man did not take his arm or give any other sign of considering him under arrest. Out in the street a discreet-looking

black coupé, driven by a coachman in unobtrusive livery, stood waiting. Deodato's conductor motioned him to get in, and then seated himself by his side.

"Where are we going, Monsieur?" asked Deodato with a propitiatory smile.

"It will appear when we arrive," was the answer, and the old gentleman turned his head to look out of the window, as if desiring no further conversation.

The carriage drove on at a smooth pace. They passed from shadowy side-streets into the glare and gaiety of a large boulevard, and back into dimmer ways again. Then suddenly the river appeared, rippling with the reflections of the quayside lamps, and on the right a long, many-windowed façade which Deodato recognised. "But it is the Louvre!" he explained. His companion again stuck his monocle in his eye, and silenced him with a glance.

The carriage stopped outside a tall, arched entry, flanked by stone lions. "Descend!" said the old gentleman. As he stood beside Deodato on the pavement, fumbling with a bunch of keys, a man in a dark frock-coat and top-hat sauntered up with the air of an idle stroller. "It is all right, Alessandri," said the old gentleman in a low voice, fitting a key into a wicket of the great door, and, without speaking, the man strolled on to join two or three others, dressed like himself, under a neighbouring lamp-post.

"Quickly!" said Deodato's conductor, and he stepped through the wicket into an immense courtyard steeped in moonshine. Down one side of it ran a line of tall railings broken in the middle by an arch crowned with statuary. Deodato's suspicions of the last few minutes were confirmed. They were in the Tuileries! What did it mean? His heart began to beat half-fearfully.

But the old gentleman gave him no time to think, beckoning him impatiently along till they came to an entrance in the corner of the court, which opened upon a rich, gas-lit vestibule. From this a staircase ascended, and at the foot of the stair stood one of the gorgeous soldiers Deodato had seen riding down the Champs-Élysées on his first morning in Paris, with a carbine in his hand. This sentry stared in front of him like a statue, and took not the least notice of them as they passed.

Deodato's conductor turned to the right and led the way into a long, dim corridor on the ground floor. Deodato followed with a somnambulistic feeling, too stunned even to wonder any more.

After what seemed miles of walking, they turned into a small ante-room, out of which opened a more splendidly decorated salon with a vaulted roof. Here, as they entered, an usher wearing maroon-coloured tails, a chain and a sword stood up and bowed.

A solemnity seemed to have come into the atmosphere. The thin old gentleman who had brought Deodato thus far on his pilgrimage put up his eyeglass and looked him over again, from head to foot. "*Maintenant, faites attention !*" he said, raising a warning finger. Then he nodded to the usher, who swung round with an almost military precision, and opening a pair of folding doors into a further room, passed through them.

Deodato, with his heart thudding intolerably, heard a murmur of voices within. Then the usher reappeared, and said in a low tone, "*Entrez, M. Mocquard !*"

M. Mocquard turned his head over his shoulder to Deodato, his little eyes glittering, almost anxious. "Follow me !" he whispered out of the corner of his lips, "and don't forget to bow . . . to the Emperor !"

(4)

For some moments Deodato was overwhelmed with terror. Thus without preparation, without warning, friendless and in the middle of the night, to be precipitated into the fearful presence of the mystery of Europe, the man of December, the pitiless autocrat, master of spies, secret police and penal colonies ! To appear in his ragged, travel-soiled clothes before the imperial majesty whose mere escort shone like the gods of Olympus ! What could it mean ? What had he done ? How must he behave ? He had a confused impression of a large room hung with green silk and lit by shaded lamps, of an immense map occupying nearly the whole of one wall, a big writing-table with bronze fittings, and a padded arm-chair of green leather with high head-rests.

To this arm-chair he now saw that his conductor was bowing as if desirous of touching the carpet with his nose ; and following the direction of this obeisance with his eyes, he saw sunk in the chair a little stout man, with short legs resting nervelessly side by side on a footstool. With one hand he was softly stroking his moustache, and in the other he held a half-smoked cigarette. Something about the face with its huge hooked nose that seemed to drag the head

forward caused the most grotesque of comparisons to shoot into Deodato's mind, and as he recollected to bow low in his turn, he found himself repeating inwardly in a paroxysm of nervousness, "Ow de do, Mr. Punch, 'ow de do?"

At the same instant, almost, a second remembrance darted like lightning across his brain. . . . *Old Beaky!* . . . He was here! All Marsh's fantastic tale was true, and the eccentric French exile he had saved in a tomb in Highgate cemetery and produced alive again for the confounding of Europe was . . . the son of Queen Hortense of Holland, Louis Napoleon Bonaparte, author of the *coup d'état* and Emperor of the French!

A deep, sleepy voice vibrated through the room. "That will do, Mocquard. You can leave us for the present. Félix will call you to re-conduct the young person."

Deodato heard the folding-doors close softly, and as he stood upright again the voice said with a mild drawl, "Approach, *mon enfant!* You have nothing to fear."

Deodato walked with shaking knees across the thick carpet, and came to a halt some twelve paces from the Emperor's arm-chair.

Napoleon had picked up from a table by his elbow what Deodato recognised as Marsh's letter, and was reading it through again, still twirling his moustache. While he did so, Deodato, his first panic subsiding, as it came home to him that this figure of legend was, after all, a human being, studied him narrowly, trying to adjust the picture Marsh had given to his imagination with the reality.

There was certainly no doubt about the beak, projecting, bony and predacious, from a pale lined face with pouched eyelids. The Emperor's own Parisians called him, behind his back, *Badinguet*, the "Beaky One." The lips, half-hidden by the growth of hair above and below, showed, where they did, full, moist and sensual, with a drooping tendency in the straight lower one. What had not struck Marsh, however, was the crag-like forehead, with its intellectual protuberances over the brows, a forehead of daunting authority, across the top of which at this moment a lock of the longish, greying hair had fallen. Nor, Deodato quickly perceived, had the monumental sculptor realised either the depth or the force of the mysterious grey eyes, which gleamed half-hidden by the rising lower lids. Their beauty was marred by the closeness with which they stood in to the great nose, almost squinting in a kind of gentle, but indecipherable, craftiness.

"*Eh, bien! oui!*" said the Emperor at length. "It was I . . . M. Charles. It is one of my *prénoms*. I really had the right to it." He suddenly smiled in a rueful, almost schoolboyish way. Just for a moment he seemed to place himself, familiarly, beside Deodato, and to gaze with wonderment at his other, imperial self in the arm-chair. It was for a moment only. The clifflike brow closed down, the eyes nearly vanished into the slit of the lids, the face stiffened to a mask, its impenetrability increased by a cloud of cigarette smoke shot out by an unexpected movement of the hand to the mouth. In the green, shaded apartment it loomed for an instant like a stone Sphinx indeed, veiled by evening Nile mists.

"That poor Marsh!" drawled the voice from behind the smoke. "How did he fare? He writes to me here as one gravely ill, indeed stricken to death. Tell me, how did he fare, *mon enfant*?"

"Alas, Mon . . . Monseigneur," answered Deodato, stammering with embarrassment, and frightened by the sound of his own voice, "he is dead. He died the day I left London."

"You are Italian, are you not? Speak in your own tongue. Speak frankly! Why were you in such haste to leave your master's poor body?" Napoleon's voice had grown even softer; but there was something chilling in this softness. Deodato realised that the Emperor was displeased, and a cold fear crept over him. "I . . . I had to fly, Monsignore!" he gasped, "I was in danger of my own life."

"In danger? How? From whom?" The voice sounded petulant, suspicious, dissatisfied.

"From those who poisoned him, Monsignore . . . and would have poisoned me!"

"Poison! . . . Murder! . . . Those are strong words, young man," mumbled Napoleon. "Explain yourself, pray!"

Deodato disjointedly threw out scraps of his story, not knowing what to utter and what to omit. He did not know whether Napoleon, sitting with a wandering eye and puffing cigarette-smoke through his lips and nostrils, was listening to him or not.

"In all that there is nothing but your suspicions," he pronounced shrewdly, when Deodato at last faltered into silence. "There are no proofs—unless the physicians were to make an examination of that poor Marsh's remains. But it is doubtless too late now . . . and, in any case, would not restore my poor friend to life." He opened his eyes suddenly wide, and bent a soft, but penetrating, bluish beam

on Deodato. "I believe you have been telling me the truth. . . . I am glad of it . . . ! The old woman, I remember her well ; she is a tigress ! The young one risked betraying all, to have her vengeance upon you. *Voilà bien la femme jalouse !*" he added glumly, drifting back to French. "But one may say you scarcely deserved better at her hands. You betrayed her, did you not ?"

Deodato had not admitted this, but did not now deny the charge. Napoleon watched a smoke-ring float up towards the ceiling, as if his Empire depended on it. "You are very young," he murmured, still staring upwards. "We have all been young. . . . All that—it is the past ! . . . The question now is, what ought I to do with you ?"

He ground out the stub of his cigarette into a little classical tripod standing on the table beside him next to a golden snuff-box with a medallion of Napoleon I on its lid. "What ought I to do with you ?" he repeated thoughtfully, twisting and smoothing his moustaches again. He seemed to drift off into a dream of his own. "That poor Marsh," he murmured ; "he was truly my friend. He saved me from death and he asked no return. . . . I have met very few men like that in my life. . . . In fact, I still hardly understand it. But it is certain, anyhow, that he was the instrument in the hands of God for preserving my life for France and for Europe. That madman Orsini already in those years was on my tracks, judging that I had been a perjurer for seeking to restore the Empire at Boulogne. I thought when I emerged from that vault at 'Ighgate that I had thrown him off my scent. . . . But I found him waiting for me again outside the Opera. . . . Nevertheless, I now carry out my mission to the best of my powers . . . and it is to the poor Marsh I owe it. He never, I believe, knew what became of me. He was the most incurious of men, except about his *romans policiers* . . . with the least sense of affairs . . . the most inconsequent in his ideas . . . in brief, the perfect Englishman ! Otherwise, do you not think he would have realised from some newspaper or portrait who his M. Charles had been ? But I do not believe," the rueful smile glimmered again, "that he was interested in anything I tried to tell him. Do you believe he was ?"

"He was interested, Monseigneur," said Deodato, his heart beating again till he was ready to faint at his own daring, "he was greatly interested in your talent for solving mysteries."

"*Ça, c'est curieux !*" grunted Napoleon.

"And he had faith," continued Deodato, "that . . . your Majesty . . . would unravel mine."

Napoleon cast a vague look at Marsh's letter on the table beside him. "Is that what he would say in this very incomprehensible letter? . . . He must have been very low, the poor Marsh, when he wrote it. . . . Well, my young friend, what is there that is mysterious about you?"

"Everything, Monseigneur! I do not know who my parents are——"

"You are in the case of thousands! Do you wish that I should find time——"

A desperate sense of making a last struggle for his life brought out all the passion and obstinacy there was in Deodato. "Monseigneur!" he cried. "It was the last wish of Marsh—who never asked you for anything before!"

A glum and sour look had stolen over the Emperor's mask. He shot oblique glances at the clock on the mantelpiece, and stroked his beard slowly downwards, mumbling, "*C'est bien difficile!* . . . It is not reasonable!"

Deodato fell on his knees and stretched out his hands in appeal, "Find my parents, I entreat you, Monseigneur! You can unseal any lips!" he pleaded. "You have the means to uncover any secret! No one will disclose the truth to me. Not the *Padre Guardiano* at the convent where I was brought up in Rome . . . not the *avvocato* Greeves in London! No voice comes to me from the coffin of the Lady Pontavis!"

Napoleon started as if he had been pricked by a pin. "What was that you said?" he demanded. "Repeat that name!"

"I said the Lady Pontavis, Monseigneur, whom I saw carried to her grave."

"What could she be to you?"

"I do not know," replied Deodato despairingly. "The son of a servant of hers, her *avvocato di famiglia* told me, but I believe he lied."

"The Marchioness of Pontavis!" said Napoleon in English. His voice seemed to come from miles away. "*Est-ce possible?*" he added, and his eyes drew so close together that they seemed to be trying to coalesce. It was a sinister squint. Then they appeared to separate again, and opened, limpid and benevolent. "Tell me,

my child," he said, "everything that you can recall which bears upon this question of your paternity."

Deodato tried to sum up in a brief narrative all that the *Padre Guardiano* had said or hinted, all that Greeves had alleged or admitted or suggested by his silences, and his own suspicions while watching the funeral of Lady Pontavis.

"But, have you," Napoleon asked when he concluded, "have you no trace at all of your parents? No gift or remembrance?"

"None, Monseigneur!"

"No trinket, then, or scrap of writing?"

"Nothing at all, Monseigneur."

"No amulet or sacred token?" pursued the Emperor with mild obstinacy.

"No . . . But, yes! There is my scapular! Found round my neck when I was discovered before the altar in the church of San Francesco . . . I have never parted from it!"

"Give it to me!" The Emperor held out his fat little hand.

Deodato hesitated. To surrender his scapular to another hand for the first time in his life! Would that be winning his luck or giving it away?

Napoleon turned his head with a look of stately surprise, and Deodato blushing pulled the worn string over his head and handed over the little cloth square.

The Emperor bent over it, feeling it with his short, plump fingers. At that moment there came a tapping at the door.

"*Entrez!*" he called, his head bent in close concentration over the cheap little religious symbol.

The usher Félix appeared, hesitant. "M. Rouher, sire, awaits your majesty's pleasure."

"He must wait," drawled the Emperor, without stirring.

The usher coughed deferentially. "I should have said, sire, that M. le Ministre has been waiting already half an hour."

"Let him go on waiting then! *C'est embêtant, à la fin!*" exclaimed Napoleon, looking up with the sour, bored look that his servants dreaded. Félix was retiring abashed when the Emperor checked him. "I need something to cut with," he murmured, "scissors . . . or a knife."

Deodato automatically clapped his hand to his waist-belt, where he had been used as a rule since his puppet-show days to carry a clasp-knife. Napoleon glanced up in time to remark his gesture. With

a smothered cry he pushed his chair back with his foot. At the same instant Félix rushed forward, his chain tinkling, and pinned Deodato's arms to his side.

There was a moment's pause. Deodato, looking bewildered at Napoleon's face, saw pearls of sweat on it, and suddenly recalled how Marsh had said he once saw old Beaky looking like green cheese.

"Pardon, sire," he stammered . . . "I generally carry a knife at my belt . . . my carving-tool . . . But not to-night . . . And M. Mocquard, too, searched me before we started. I am unarmed, truly!"

There was another pause during which Deodato saw by the light of the lamp on the side-table a drop of perspiration run slowly down Napoleon's long nose and disappear into his moustache. Then he turned to Félix and said: "A pair of scissors, at once! Do not bring a knife!"

"Scissors, sire?" The usher look disconcerted.

"Scissors. Ask M. Mocquard if he has not perhaps a pair."

The usher darted from the room. Napoleon lifted the scapular close to the lamp, and studied it with fresh intentness.

"Did you know," he rumbled, "that this has been opened and sewn up again? Evidently! The thread at the top is dark-grey, the rest black."

Deodato stared at him amazed. What! He already knew more about this scapular than its twenty years' wearer?

Félix returned with a worried look. "M. Mocquard, sire, is desolated; he has no scissors in the Palace."

"Find me some!"

Félix shifted uneasily from foot to foot. "At this hour, sire, the stores of your majesty's *régie* are closed."

"Have them opened!"

"The keys, sire, are in the office of the Comptroller of the Palace."

"Go and find them, Félix!"

"In the absence of *M. le Contrôleur*, I shall need a written order from your majesty to the Adjutant-General of the Palace, General Rollin, before I can touch the keys."

"All for a pair of scissors, Félix?"

The usher bowed. "They are your Imperial Majesty's own regulations," he said reverentially.

The Emperor sighed. Then an idea came to him. "Ascend,

Félix, to the *appartement* of her Majesty the Empress. Ask her, or her ladies, to be so kind as to lend me a pair of scissors."

"I go at once to notify her Majesty's Chamberlain-in-Waiting that I bring a message from your Majesty."

Left alone with Deodato, the Emperor sat gloomily puffing at a fresh cigarette till he nearly disappeared from sight in blue clouds. Then an oracular voice came rumbling from behind this veil. "If I had remained President of a democratic Republic, I could have had anything I wanted in two minutes. But Europe needed the stability of the Empire." He paused and added impressively, "*L'Empire, c'est la paix!*"

They waited in silence, while Deodato looked from the dim, bearded face of Napoleon amid its smoke-wreaths to the hatchet-shaped profile of the portrait of Cæsar hanging by the mantelpiece, and from the enormous map of Paris on the wall, with Haussmann's boulevards boldly scored across it, to a crayon sketch of the Emperor on horseback at the battle of Solferino.

At last the usher returned with a salver on which lay a tiny pair of ornamental scissors. "Her Majesty the Empress," he said, "commands me to inform your Majesty that she has borrowed these scissors from her Excellency the Carpatho-Croatian Ambassadors, who would be desolated should any accident befall them."

"We will take the greatest care," answered the Emperor meekly, and, as Félix retired, began to snip carefully at the two layers of cloth composing the scapular. Presently he poked his fat forefinger inside, gave a little sigh of content, and setting his cigarette between his teeth, began to enlarge the hole he had made and to feel within again.

Deodato looked on, fascinated and astounded. His scapular! How was it possible that from this little emblem, regarded by him in childhood with religious reverence, and latterly only saved from being thrown away by some faint, superstitious scruple, how was it possible that out of this the revelation of his secret was coming? Indeed he scarcely recognised the familiar object any longer as he watched it being sounded and probed by the most powerful hands in Europe.

Napoleon had laid aside the scissors now, and begun to fish in earnest with his squat fingers. Deodato with eyes that grew rounder and larger saw him slowly extract a torn fragment of green silk, a tatter from a cover it looked like, and as he held it up to the lamp,

turning it over from back to front, Deodato fancied that he saw a monogram in faded yellow thread.

Overcome by his curiosity, he had edged forward closer and closer over the soft carpet till he found himself now within a foot or two of the Emperor's chair. Napoleon in his absorption had not noticed him till he let out a breath of suppressed excitement. At that sound the Emperor looked up sharply, his face lengthening, his hand stroking his beard slowly downwards, and his eyes taking on a glazed look that was the most unpleasant thing Deodato had seen since he entered the room. Napoleon seemed to look completely through him at the opposite wall, and yet Deodato was very sure that he was watching him, watching him with extreme displeasure. Deodato retreated backwards till he was nearly up against the wall at his back.

Napoleon jerked a velvet bell-pull that hung over his chair. "M. Mocquard!" he said to the usher, and sat still again, his hand clapped down upon the bit of cloth with its monogram, his glazed eyes still passing through and resting on Deodato in that disconcerting way till the Secretary arrived.

"Mocquard," he then drawled, "take this young man to . . ." he paused, and Deodato felt a red-hot spasm of fear, "to," Napoleon once more hesitated, "to . . . the respectable lodging you spoke of." Deodato breathed with relief. "He is not to leave Paris. I may send for him again. Impress upon him the necessity of absolute silence upon his visit here . . . for his own sake!"

He dropped back in his chair, closing his eyes and lifting his cigarette slowly to his lips . . . M. Mocquard bowed, and signalled to Deodato to do the same; then motioned to him to withdraw with him. While they backed towards the door, Deodato, with his eyes fixed on the limp form of the Emperor lolling up against the side of his arm-chair with his little legs dangling in front of him, was again in spite of his recent terror reminded irreverently of Mr. Punch leaning up against the side of the *slumarey* before the show began.

As he and his conductor disappeared through the folding glass-doors through which they had entered, they heard Félix announce through another door, "*M. le Ministre des Travaux Publics et du Commerce*," and saw enter, bowing, a portly gentleman with a moon-shaped, whiskered face and a shifty glance, bearing a portfolio under his arm. Deodato felt sure that M. Rouher's beady eyes had taken him in, though he seemed to be looking towards the Emperor alone.

Then he followed the Secretary Mocquard back along the dim and silent corridor ; past the Cent-Gardes in the vestibule in his blue and steel, still staring with the same wax-work air, his gauntlet clenched in exactly the same place upon his carbine ; through the moon-lit courtyard and the lion-gate ; and found the coupé still waiting on the quay.

CHAPTER TWO

P A T E R N A L

(I)

WITH Mocquard again sitting in silence by his side, but glancing at him from time to time through his eyeglass, Deodato was driven across the river. The coupé traversed a labyrinth of streets, less brilliantly lit than those on the Right Bank, many of them old, dim and medieval-looking, others rent by gaping demolitions, one or two of them new-cut boulevards through the maze, gleaming to the moonbeams in fresh stone and plaster. For an instant at the top of a rise the dome of the Pantheon loomed black against the sky.

They stopped at last in an ancient, sloping street of blackish houses, still lit in places by lamps in iron brackets. Mocquard, after repeating the Emperor's injunction of absolute silence upon Deodato, led the way, sniffing with some distaste, down an oozing passage into a tiny court, and after consulting the numbers painted beside the entries, rapped on a peeling door.

It was opened by a rat-faced woman in an apron and felt slippers, who looked at the gentlemen suspiciously.

"Mme. Dubonnet?" enquired Mocquard in his thin, peremptory voice. "Good. I come," he lowered his tone, "on the part of M. Dubonnet's Friend. Is your husband at home?"

Deodato observed that at the mention of M. Dubonnet's Friend the rat-like woman's attitude changed to one of abject deference. She wiped her hands nervously on her apron. "Unhappily, Monsieur, my husband is out. But I can send one of the children to fetch him immediately. He is only gone to the *estaminet* for a drink."

"It is unnecessary, I think," replied M. Mocquard. "We are bringing him a young gentleman to whom he is desired to give lodging for a few days." The woman nodded, with an air, Deodato fancied, of deeper comprehension than the simple words warranted. "Monsieur," pursued the Secretary, "will not be leaving Paris

while he lodges with M. Dubonnet and yourself . . . It is well understood? Good! M. Dubonnet's Friend," again the woman seemed to cringe, "will see him to-morrow morning at the usual place."

He took a curt leave of Deodato, and the woman led him up an uncarpeted stair into an attic bedroom with a sloping roof, containing little furniture but a box-bed. It was much more squalid than his last refuge, and when, after refusing supper, Deodato sat down alone and looked about him by the light of a common dip, he felt crushingly depressed. From the Tuileries to this den! Was that where his hopes had led him? What could they mean to do with him? He remembered all he had ever heard of the manner in which persons disagreeable to the Emperor were spirited away from the knowledge of their family or friends, and realised his own lonely helplessness. But what was there for him but obedience? . . . And silence—he recalled the Emperor's emphasis with a shiver.

He was in such an overwrought state that the sound of a tapping at the door made him jump off his bed as if he had been shot at. "*Entrez!*" he quavered, and round the door came a face. It was plump and pale, clean-shaven like an actor's, with black hair receding in deep bays from the forehead and black-rimmed spectacles veiling the eyes. The mouth was opened in an ingratiating smile, showing the teeth, which were rare and broken; but the smile seemed mechanical, and the eyes behind the convex glasses had a watery instability; indeed they hardly seemed to be there at all. . . . Suddenly Deodato longed with all his soul to be met again by a frank and friendly look . . . like the poor *Padrone's*! All this night he had not met a look that was not guarded—Mocquard's bird-like, distrustful darts; the Emperor's shifting expression, now paternal, now veiled and glazed; M. Rouher's wary glance from the distance . . . and now these intolerably fugacious optics.

"Pardon, M'sieu!" The newcomer had edged into the room, a black felt hat in his hand. "I am Dubonnet, your host. I have just returned home. Has Monsieur everything he desires?"

"I believe so," answered Deodato slowly. "Tell me, M. Dubonnet, where am I?"

"In my house!" His host giggled. "But you are, I see, a stranger to Paris. We are in Rue Mouffetard . . . naturally, that says little to you! It is a respectable quarter, but not rich . . . I

myself am not rich!" He giggled again at the ridiculous supposition.

"You keep a private hotel or *pension*, then, M. Dubonnet?"

"Monsieur does me too much honour! My house is far too humble for a *pension*."

"How come I then to have the pleasure——"

"The pleasure! Monsieur is truly too good! Monsieur is Italian, if I may judge from his accent? I thought so. I like the Italians very much. You are welcome, Monsieur, to my poor home."

Deodato was not to be evaded. "Why did M. Mocquard bring me here?" he demanded.

"Who is that—M. Mocquard? I don't know any M. Mocquard."

"Why have you taken me in, M. Dubonnet?"

"But to oblige a Friend, naturally! . . . Now, Monsieur, it seems to me a trifle chilly in this room. Would you care to come downstairs for a little chat? I can offer you a *sirop*."

Deodato thanked him; but when they were sitting together in the parlour, sparsely furnished with a wooden table and chairs, a red-checked table-cloth and a crude oleograph of the Emperor on the walls, he found that it was not he who was making the discoveries. M. Dubonnet had a method of questioning that was almost too polite, and very difficult to elude. Deodato wondered how far the imperial injunction to silence extended. He thought, however, that there could be no harm in admitting that he had come from London.

"Ah! from London! Monsieur was engaged in commerce there? . . . No? . . . In an artistic studio? . . . Ah! it is a great happiness, surely, to be an artist! . . . But it cannot have been in London that Monsieur was trained in art! . . . Ah! in Rome! A very different affair . . . Would Monsieur care for another small *sirop*? . . . So, Monsieur has lived in the Eternal City! What a privilege! . . . He has not been lately in Rome? . . . He left it last year. At what time of the year? Monsieur must pardon my curiosity, but a friend of mine was there in that year, and Monsieur might have met him. But if Monsieur went to England in the spring that would have been impossible . . . Monsieur left many friends in Rome? . . . Very few? What a pity! . . . Monsieur must make up for it in Paris." Paris was a very friendly place, M. Dubonnet could assure him.

It appeared, indeed, that M. Dubonnet had several Italian friends in the Quartier Latin . . . artists, some of them too. They were

bons garçons for the most part . . . so long as they kept out of politics . . . In fact there was a little club which Monsieur might be amused to visit some evening . . . if he was at leisure, of course . . . Monsieur expected to be called away at any moment? . . . That was a pity, too, but after all, as the saying was, *les affaires sont les affaires*!

In the two or three following days Deodato found that no one tried to prevent him going freely about Paris. One afternoon, however, he found, at the end of a long ramble, M. Dubonnet looking into the window of a shop some fifty yards behind him. He giggled when accosted. "It is that I was looking for some tempting *saucissons* for your supper, *cher Monsieur*," he explained. "You come a long way from home to look for sausages," answered Deodato.

After that he kept his eyes open, and a morning or two later duly spotted Dubonnet through the reflection in a window, watching from the opposite pavement. He shot up a side-street when Deodato turned round, and on being taxed at mid-day with following, protested vehemently that he had not been near the Rue du Bac (where the meeting had occurred) that morning; he and the children had been helping Madame with the washing.

"Monsieur has seen somebody resembling me," he declared. "I am not a distinguished figure like Monsieur! I am a common type, if you like! *Populacier, je le sais bien*! There are hundreds of me in Paris!" and he went giggling happily down the stairs.

Nor did he seem to bear any malice for the accusation; but that very evening bore Deodato off, arm in arm, to the little Italian *cercle* of which he had told him. It was in a dingy by-way of the Quartier Latin, and M. Dubonnet gave a peculiar knock for admittance. Inside, it turned out to be a humble *estaminet* where Italian labourers and a few models from neighbouring studios were supping off macaroni or *frittate* at small tables, and Italian vermouth and other national drinks were served at the *comptoir*. Behind this room an opening through worn plush curtains, looped back, led into a sort of back-parlour, more obscurely lit than the front part, in which groups could be dimly discerned through the smoke of cheap cigars, chatting, or playing dominoes if they were near enough to the oil-lamps hanging smokily from the ceiling.

M. Dubonnet introduced Deodato to a youngish fellow, who, he said, had been in Garibaldi's Legion in the late war, and who, it turned out by an odd chance, had met Toni Baccelli in Milan.

This gave the two a subject of conversation, and M. Dubonnet soon left them, to flit about the far end of the room, prattling and giggling and giving advice to the domino players as he passed.

The ex-Garibaldian said he must go home early, and went off through the front part of the café. Deodato was left looking aimlessly round, when suddenly a voice behind him that made all his nerves tingle, said, "What are you doing here, *Fratricello*?"

Deodato whipped round, and found himself looking into the contemptuous eyes of Piero Santacroce. He was sitting alone at a little table by the curtains dividing the two rooms, with a glass of absinthe before him, and wrapped in a velvet-collared cloak that concealed his mutilated arm.

For the moment Deodato was so aghast at his audacity that he could only whisper, "Are you mad, to come here?"

"I am safer that you think, *Fratónzolo*," retorted the other coolly, lifting a cigar to his lips with his uninjured hand. "I am in France under the ægis of a most respectable lawyer and member of the Liberal Opposition. I met him in Switzerland, and told him a tale of an overturned carriage, a shattered limb and a successful amputation. I confessed to being a good Republican, with relatives I was dying to visit in Paris . . . No trouble about a passport, travelling with my honourable and respected friend. Besides I have now, as you may see, a well-made artificial hand of Swiss invention," he protruded it in a black glove a little way beyond his cloak. "Also," he added, taking a sip of his absinthe, while his eyes gleamed with puerile Mephistophelean malice, "I have been drowned, as you know, in the Tiber."

"Does everyone believe that?"

"It matters little to me! Italians are all the rage in Paris just now, and Orsini himself is canonised . . . If they did recognise me, would they desire another *cause célèbre*, another of Favre's tremendous speeches—a fine windbag that fellow, and a pretty revolution *he* will ever make! May I be there to see! . . . Another martyrdom, would they wish that? Not very probable!"

"Still," expostulated Deodato, "what need was there to come into the most dangerous city of Europe—for you?"

"What need, *Fratricello*? First, to maintain my connections, especially with my best-loved kinswoman, Marianne!" He grinned as he uttered the cant name for the Republic. "Secondly, to mark how the good work goes on. Thirdly, to see if I can have a word with

my lovely sister . . . which seems harder than it was to get into France. She and her bandit of a husband are still high favourites, it seems, at the Tuileries . . . France forgives them easily enough for their active part in sending thousands of her sons to die on the plains of Lombardy, to prop *Badinguet* on his throne."

"To make Italy free!" contradicted Deodato.

"Bah!" sneered Piero. "Are you fooled by that too? The whole people seems duped to-day by this cry of 'nationality.' Who is my 'national'? The man who thinks with me! I care not if he be Frenchman, Italian, Hungarian, Pole or Yankee! My little sister's war! It has but served to rivet fresh chains on her country! 'Nationality!' Where is the man who will organise me an 'International' of the labouring classes? He will be found one day . . . But what use is it to preach to you, *Fratónzolo*? . . . What are you doing? Still hunting the other Napoleon, the golden one?" he sniggered.

Deodato flushed. "That is my affair."

"Well, how came you here? They are pretty strict about the entry to this club . . . though, no doubt, like all the others, it is full of police spies and *agents provocateurs*."

"My landlord brought me," said Deodato shortly.

"Which is he? . . . The little squat man over there? H'm, I can only see the back of his head."

As he said this, Dubonnet happened to turn round, and the vague eyes behind his spectacles roamed round the room. Deodato turned to speak to Piero, and saw to his astonishment that he had gone a sickly white. His glance, as he looked at Deodato, was livid with hate. "So that is your *Amphitryon*, is it?" he muttered. "*Bonsoir, mon bourgeois!* Pay for my *consommation*, will you?" He dropped some coins on the table, and wriggling out of his place between it and the wall, slipped round the curtains and was gone.

Deodato stood staring, more nonplussed than ever by his behaviour. The next moment a hand was laid on his shoulder. "To whom were you speaking, Monsieur?" said the voice of M. Dubonnet.

"I do not know," answered Deodato. "A stranger who demanded a light for his cigar."

"And you fell into talk?"

"It is true."

"About what, may one ask?"

" But about the splendid new buildings of Paris ! "

" Excuse me, if you will be so kind ! " M. Dubonnet slipped off through the café, and disappeared in his turn.

Deodato waited for about an hour but M. Dubonnet did not return. Then, perplexed and worried, he walked out of the club, without anybody trying to detain him, and, not without difficulty, made his way back to the Rue Mouffetard. Mme. Dubonnet, who let him in, said that her husband had not yet returned.

(2)

Deodato had intended the next morning to question M. Dubonnet about his odd and discourteous behaviour ; but the whole matter was driven out of his mind by the arrival, quite early, of M. Mocquard in his coupé, to fetch him away.

And it was a very different M. Mocquard from the one who had so curtly left him in charge of the Dubonnets. He was smiling all over his thin lips ; he raised his hat when Deodato appeared in the parlour, shook his hand and addressed him as "*Cher Monsieur*." He explained as they drove away, that he had come to take Deodato to luncheon in his own house before waiting on the Emperor again this evening. It would be a great pleasure to him to make the better acquaintance of Monsieur, and—*ce qui ne gêterait rien*—he had been provided from a source he was not just at the moment entitled to disclose with the means to renew Monsieur's wardrobe. So M. Mocquard, prattling genially, but always with that flavour of cynical amusement in his smile.

" I am not sorry," said Deodato bluntly, " to be leaving the Dubonnets."

" You were badly enough lodged there, no doubt ! " laughed M. Mocquard.

" That was not my chief complaint."

" You found yourself followed, eh ? " M. Mocquard seemed hugely amused. " There is no need to make any secret of it now. His Majesty's Government, you will understand, my dear sir, is bound to make certain investigations, to take certain precautions, in times like these. . . . If we had known what we know now . . . " He put up his monocle and surveyed his companion, respectfully, but still with that air of amusement.

"Then I suppose M. Dubonnet's Friend——"

"Is M. Hyrvoix, Chief of the Emperor's Secret Police. Dubonnet, I believe, is one of his best agents. . . . There is no reason why you should not know. . . . I hope you are now finished for ever with all that world!"

Deodato felt a cold quiver as he remembered how Dubonnet had shot off on the track of Piero. . . . But he had seen the agent smiling behind M. Mocquard in the parlour this morning, and fancied he would have shown a different mien if he had captured Piero . . . or even satisfactorily identified him. Nor, he reflected, would he himself, probably, have been sitting here listening to M. Mocquard's agreeable gossip.

After a gourmet's luncheon in M. Mocquard's house, Deodato put on his new suit of clothes, one of several brought to try on by an English tailor, and fitting him well enough. Indeed, M. Mocquard surveyed him through his eyeglass with more whole-hearted approbation than he had yet shown. His new vesture became Deodato astonishingly. He did not recognise himself in the glass, especially after his moustaches had been trimmed and waxed, his rude growth of beard reduced to the correct imperial tuft by a barber who called for the purpose. A fresh personality seemed to have been imposed on him, and he accepted it passively, acquiescing again, just as on the day when he had started out with the puppet-show, in the manifestations of Fate, content to wait and watch the unrolling of his baffling destiny. He held his head high and assumed a quiet dignity, not of set purpose, but as something that it seemed natural now to do.

Except for his new clothes Deodato might have believed that he was repeating his former nocturnal visit to the Tuileries in a dream that night. Once again he found himself driven along the quay, admitted by the lion-gate, passing the glittering Cent-Gardes, and shown into the softly shaded, green-walled cabinet of the Emperor. As if he had not moved since Deodato last bowed himself out of the presence, Napoleon was sitting sunk in his arm-chair, his little legs side by side on the foot-stool, the half-smoked cigarette in his hand sending up its whorls of blue smoke.

But, as Deodato drew himself up after his bow, he realised that this time there *was* a difference. Someone else was standing in the shadow close up by the long window-curtains, who emerged from them like a ripple passing along their folds as the Emperor motioned

him forward with his cigarette-hand. The light from a gas-globe fell full on his face as he came to a standstill in an attitude that had little of etiquette about it. Ignoring the Emperor, he was staring at Deodato as if at some vision.

Deodato in his turn stared back at him. A little, frail old man, who in the few steps he had taken from the window had revealed a marked limp. Dark-grey hair, trimmed in short ear-whiskers, framed the high, seamed forehead. The aged face, with the brownish skin shrinking over the bones, revealed an ascetic delicacy and refinement worked upon it by Time. Deodato gazing at it thought of this face as a map scored and re-scored with the lines of countless explorations, countless battles, countless catastrophes and countless triumphs. Its parchment was faintly sprinkled with the frost of age, a frost that stopped well short of the brilliant dark eyes glowing through gold-rimmed spectacles under brows whose blackness betrayed art—for they could hardly have defied the powdering-pot of Time so completely, to lend power and relief to the eyes below them, without the pencil. His clean-shavenness, except for the tiny, curled whiskers, his high-piled neckcloth, and the collar-ends impinging on his cheeks, gave him the look of a *revenant* from an earlier age, so remote were they from the fashions of the hour. . . . And still he stood ignoring all etiquette while he gazed at Deodato, until the bewildered youth suddenly saw the dark eyes dim, and then shine like basalt wetted by a shower.

"There is the young man, Count!" drawled Napoleon mildly.

"*Ce n'est pas possible! Ah! ce n'est pas possible!*" murmured the old man in a worn voice in which there yet lingered a silvery cadence.

The Emperor stroked and smoothed his moustaches, looking like a sleek cat washing its whiskers. He seemed immensely pleased with himself.

"The resemblance is marked, astonishingly marked," he purred. "Indeed I feel I did badly not to notice it from the first moment the young man presented himself—at any rate from the first moment a certain name was mentioned!"

At the word "resemblance" Deodato started and looked again at the old man. With the portraitist's quick eye he caught at once the point of the chin, the hollow cheeks, the long curve of the mouth, sunken and folded though it was. For a second he seemed to see his own face in a mirror beside the grey head, and a cry mounted to

his lips which was anticipated by the other. "*Mon fils! ah! mon fils!*" he exclaimed and took a step towards Deodato with his arms outstretched.

"Pardon, Count!" The Emperor's voice vibrated through the room; he lifted his hand authoritatively. And, as the two men checked and turned towards him, "It is not in the presence of a third party," he murmured, with his gentle, half-rueful smile, "that these greetings should be exchanged. It is the Emperor who is *de trop!*" He still smiled, but Deodato divined that he shrank temperamentally from the display of emotions in others as much as in himself. "It is enough," he continued, "that we have established the fact. Count Caprano, this is your son—you do not contest the identification, do you?" The Count shook his head, wiping his eyes with his handkerchief. "Young man," pursued the Emperor, "this is your father . . . who will tell you all the rest that remains to be told himself."

"Sire," said Count Caprano brokenly, "give me leave to thank you at least! Your perspicacity has been—that of the Emperor! Not one of your subjects could have divined this relationship as you have done!"

Napoleon sleeked his moustaches again with a gratified air. "And," continued the Count, "if the evidence your Majesty discovered was not enough . . . there is the resemblance which you have mentioned. My mouth, my chin!"

"And," the Emperor breathed in a voice as light as the circle of cigarette smoke that floated out with it, "the blue eyes of Mabel! . . . The wonderful blue eyes of Mabel!"

As Napoleon turned his gaze up dreamily towards the ceiling, Deodato saw the man he was trying to fit in his mind to the name "Father," undergo an extraordinary change. The wet eyes were quenched in a sullen smoulder; the frail little body stiffened; his father seemed to be trying to lift his chin more proudly than his bowed old shoulders would allow. His arm, which had been gracefully gesticulating, came with a jerk to his side, and he placed his old-fashioned *chapeau claque* formally in the hollow of his shoulder. For a minute he stood almost defiant, a taut little figure of whipcord against the rotund, soft shape of his master lolling in the arm-chair.

Napoleon, with his cat-like sensitiveness, was conscious of the effect his words had made. He turned towards Count Caprano an expressionless mask, with the eyelids drooping and the heavy nose

dragging the head forward. "My felicitations to you both," he rumbled in a voice that seemed to come right down his beak. "You, my dear Count, recover by your own wish, a son born . . . in circumstances which you will explain . . . but whom in any case you desired to embrace, and who will, you hope, do you credit. You, young man, see where your fortunate Star has led you! Take care that you follow it faithfully now! Try to repay Providence that has in an almost miraculous fashion restored you to the arms of your father—your father, who is one of the most faithful servitors of my dynasty and the owner of one of the most honoured names of the Empire. France will expect faithful service from you, now, Monsieur! . . . I will not detain either of you any longer, gentlemen. You have so much to tell each other. . . . Be so good, *M. le Comte*, as to present Monsieur your son in the style agreed upon at our reception on Friday evening. Her Majesty is kind enough to wish to see the young man before we return to Saint-Cloud for a little rest at last." He sighed. "The celebration of victory is even more exhausting than the winning of it," he murmured, closing his eyes with a slight inclination of his head in token of dismissal.

As soon as they had retired across the threshold of the Imperial cabinet, Count Caprano took his son's arm almost hungrily, as if fearful that he might disappear again before they reached the palace doors.

(3)

Deodato awoke with a start of alarm to find a man in his room. It was the valet de chambre running back the heavy velvet window-curtains on their rings, and admitting the sunshine of the August dawn in a softened glow through the gauze veils that still remained, fold laid over fold, like a ballet-dancer's muslin skirts, upon the panes. By Deodato's side, as he sat up in bed, there rose another figure, the reflection of himself in the mirror that backed the alcove in which his bed was placed. Peering into this, he saw the furnishings of the room, the tall-boy between the two windows, bearing a marble bust of Napoleon I, in the uniform of the First Consul, between two Sèvres urns, the glittering wash-stand with its three legs terminating in swan's necks, the golden word *Somno* gleaming in metal lettering across the night-table.

There was a feminine atmosphere to this bed-chamber, in spite

of the military countenance frowning between the two tall urns. The alcove in which he lay seemed a true Nest of Love—the title of a print facing him, in which an elderly woman was drawing a Cupid from a nest of living images of the tiny god, and offering him by the tips of his wings to an eager-looking young lady. On another wall Cupid again rowed himself by his bow over a stream, using his quiver for a skiff; and, glancing up, Deodato saw the rogue peeping again through the ormolu branches of the chandelier, poised a-tip-toe, like a dancer, and seeming to vaunt himself the mischievous, slender genius of the place.

Deodato remembered that this villa of his father's bore the name Cythère, and in his mind's eye he vaguely saw the suites of grand rooms below, with their lofty folding-doors, their plaster griffins, and garlands and medallions, their gilt-framed draperies, their consoles supported by Egyptian Sphinxes, their arm-chairs backed with the consular fasces, and their stiff little sofas with lion's-claw feet—all that *démodé* First Empire decoration, which was to him an entire novelty. He recalled the severe, stuccoed exterior, with its colonnade of white pillars and triangular classical pediment, standing in its own grounds amid the summer greenery of the Bois de Boulogne, with the lake shimmering at the end of the vista—and realised once more the new world into which he had been transported.

He had passed a day in Cythère, a day wholly taken up in converse with his father, and now, the moment he was fully awake, his head began to buzz with all that he had been told—the history of his family, the circumstances of his birth, his father's position and his own prospects. His mind was still confused, and memory played tricks and made gaps where he most wanted to be certain. He felt the necessity, as soon as he should see his father again this morning, of asking a hundred questions.

Had his recollection been faultless and in perfect order he would have reminded himself that the Caprano family came from Modena, where they had for generations served the Ducal Court in minor employments. Their fortunes had turned when Deodato's grandfather had been seized with enthusiasm for General Bonaparte during his triumphal Italian campaign, and had left his home to take a commission in the Revolutionary French Army. Count Francesco Caprano had been a Colonel in the Army of Egypt, General of Division in the campaign of Moscow, Grand Equerry and Aide-de-Camp to the Emperor, and finally, having by prudence amassed a

considerable fortune, a victim of the battle of Leipzig. His son, Orlando Napoleone Caprano, Deodato's father, had been a military cadet when the General was killed. The next year he had obtained during the Hundred Days a commission in the cuirassiers, and had ridden with Milhaud against the British squares on Mont Saint-Jean. There a bullet, shattering his thigh, had also shattered for ever on his first battlefield his hopes of a career of military glory. With the surgery of Waterloo year it was a miracle that he had kept his leg.

During the Restoration Deodato's father had sulked in the mansion bequeathed to him by his father in the Faubourg Saint-Honoré. He would not in any capacity serve the Bourbons and the *fleur-de-lys*, nor, like his younger brother, who became an officer in the Tsar's Preobrazhensky Guards, would he settle abroad. Debarred from the army and politics, he had found an outlet for his restless temperament in amorous conquests and artistic connoisseurship, collecting fine pictures and good furniture of the Empire period. With these he adorned the villa he had built for himself in the Bois de Boulogne with the deliberate purpose of challenging the royal château, Bagatelle, in the same park—a rivalry that nearly ruined him, for he was compelled to sell his Hotel in Paris, as well as his inherited estate and house in Italy, and to live for some years a life almost of seclusion.

It was perhaps the continued pinch of the cost of Cythère that decided Orlando Caprano, when the elder branch of the Bourbons was expelled by the Revolution of 1830, to accept a post in the diplomatic service at the hands of the "Citizen King of the French," Louis Philippe, the ex-Duke of Orleans. For seven years he served the bourgeois monarch as Minister at various minor Italian Courts, and it was while on leave of absence from his post that in Florence during the spring of 1838 he encountered the twenty-one year old Mabel Darsenay, eldest daughter of an English baronet belonging to a family that set itself above most peerages in pride of antiquity. It was, no doubt, her difference from all the women he had hitherto known that caused him after years of amorous adventure to fall so completely under the spell of the tall, self-confident English girl with her freedom and directness, used as he had been to the semi-cloistered Italian women and the sophisticated Parisiennes. In truth there was no compatibility between the two, and Mabel's dominion over his bold but volatile temperament was a precarious accident of

passion. She was serious, while he was of a versatile superficiality. She was watchful of her dignity, while he combined the scepticism of a Marquis of the old régime with the adventurous adaptability of a child of Romanticism and the Revolution. She was frigid, and this led him to believe with frenzy that there must be hidden fires within the iceberg. And when, despite his middle-age, the ardour of his wooing, joined to the magical effect of the Italian spring upon her northern nature, released in her the sense of romance hitherto rigidly constrained by her education, his belief that he had conquered the unconquerable flattered his male vanity to the point of ecstasy.

It was not, however, an affair that ever had any prospect of a smooth issue. The pride of the Darsenays, aiming always at alliances with the best English blood, would have laughed at the idea of giving one of their daughters to a foreigner of very minor nobility, and at the moment, it would seem, in embarrassed circumstances as well. Moreover an English Duke was showing an interest in the dark curls and blue eyes of Mabel. Imprudently Sir Ronald Darsenay communicated to his daughter his displeasure and his determination to take all the means open to a father at that period for thwarting the match in terms that aroused a temper as violent and autocratic as his own. Mabel, completely losing her head in her passion and her knowledge that she had already surrendered to her Italian lover, eloped with Count Caprano, who promised her a secret marriage in Rome, where there was no British diplomatic representative to stir up difficulties at the promptings of Mabel's father.

On the road the lovers lingered in the hill-towns of Umbria, to postpone facing the summer heat of Rome, and when at length they reached the city Mabel had no longer any doubt about her condition. Although Orlando Caprano sincerely intended to wed her, and had actually sent in his resignation from his diplomatic post, there proved to be difficulty and delay in arranging a marriage with the privacy they both desired in the suspicious papal city. Thus it came about that their son was born in the retired lodgings where they were living under the name of "Carloni" before the ceremony could take place, which further complicated their situation.

Everything conspired to the catastrophe that might have been predicted. Orlando had not, during the period of Mabel's child-bearing in Rome, shown himself more capable of continence than

other Italian men of his class and time. When Mabel discovered his inconstancy, an affair that seemed to him too normal and trifling to occupy his thoughts for a moment while he was away from the *ballerina* who had caught his passing fancy, appeared to her as the vengeance of a justly offended God, and as an outrage that struck at the very roots of her personality. While Orlando was absent in Modena to wind up some family business the sinister resolve took possession of her to cut herself free from this disastrous episode in her life. The infant she now shrank from as the fruit of her sin; Orlando had become loathsome to her in the revulsion from the only passion that had ever made her lose her self-ownership; the demon of family arrogance, even, raised its head again. How she bribed the child's Roman wet-nurse and her husband to take it away and adopt it as their own, has been told. Alone, sustained by her formidable pride, she travelled back to England, and by sheer force of character compelled her father to receive her again, and to support her in the story that was put about to explain her absence abroad.

"What I blame myself for," said Orlando, as he limped on his son's arm round the flower-garden of Cythère, "is that I accepted in silence the situation she made for me. . . . But you must remember, she wrote me a letter before she fled couched in terms of such insult that no man truly could support it." He gloomed at the reminiscence. "I was still not too old to desire variety and freedom . . . easily persuaded in consequence that I too had broken my career and committed a supreme folly by entangling myself with a foreigner, cold, rigid, inordinately proud of a blazon humbler than my own . . . and *bien pensante*, too, pious in that overbearing Protestant fashion, which is even harder to stomach than the devotion of Catholics! You, for me, were an uninteresting little lump of complaining flesh . . . it is not till one grows old and everything is passing away that one desires a son . . . and then it is usually too late!"

(4)

"I was amazed, sir," said Deodato when they had resumed their talk on the following afternoon, "that the Emperor seemed to divine I was Lady Pontavis's child the moment I mentioned her name."

"I am not surprised," answered his father, and the shadow fell

across his face again. This part of their confidence took place after luncheon in the great salon that extended from the front to the back of the house. The heat of the afternoon sun was cooled as it filtered through the leafage of the trees outside the long south windows; and the subdued light glimmered on the crystals of the huge chandelier, on the bronze inkstand, encasing a miniature of Napoleon by Isabey, on the writing-desk, and the ormolu mountings of the two large book-cases which ran down each side of the room, and were filled with volumes bound in precious morocco bearing the monogram of General Caprano, but containing nothing more exciting than collections of the official *Moniteur* and the *Code Napoléon*.

Orlando had added little to his father's library, for pictures, not books, were his interest; and from where they sat the gems of his collection could be seen in the northern portion of the long apartment, divided from them by columns. There was a dance of the inevitable Cupids by Albani, a harmony of pink flesh, blue skies and gold-tinted cloudlets; a Magdalen by Carlo Dolci, pearly in its morbidezza, a Bacchanalian dance by Poussin, magical in its evocation of silken twilight skies. In dark contrast to these voluptuous dreams, a series of military portraits of the First Empire by Baron Gérard and a battle-piece sombre with rolling smoke and flame by Vernet, revealed the thwarted ambitions of the owner of the gallery. In the middle of the purple Savonnerie carpet stood a superb *guéridon* like a trophy, supported by three gilded eagles and upholding a bouquet of flowers in a Sèvres tripod. The whole space had the warm stillness of an aquarium, filled with shifting green shades and stifled lights, framed in the snow-white Ionic columns, brooded over by the tearful Magdalen and the smiling cupids. A bee hovering over the flowers in the *guéridon* mingled its humming with the tick of the clock that stood, encircled by fighting Roman warriors, between the candle-bearing Victories upon the mantelpiece.

Deodato, relaxing in his arm-chair, felt a sleepy delight stealing over him which almost made him miss his father's next words. "I am not surprised," Orlando was repeating with his mouth drawn out in a grim line, "that the Emperor suspected the truth at once. Have I said that I was the only folly of Mabel's ordered and ambitious existence? It is not quite true. Louis Napoleon when he lived in London was the other . . . a folly, this time, not devoid of ambition too . . . for it would have been a greater thing, evidently, to become an Empress than a mere Countess . . . or even the

Marchioness she was made at last. In any case Napoleon pursued her violently with his attentions in London. I do not know," Orlando paused, swinging his gold-rimmed spectacles delicately between finger and thumb, "how far things went between them. I do not know which of them drew back. He is notoriously as fickle as he is sensual. Her family, perhaps, persuaded her against a second, perhaps irreparable folly—for so it would have seemed to them, no doubt, to marry a paltry Pretender with only two ludicrous failures to his credit . . . She married, rapidly, old Lord Pontavis just after Napoleon set sail for France on that third adventure which paid for all. Some say," Orlando sighed, "that she was lucky to find a husband who was too piously enwrapped in his Bible to be keen-sighted about her past. I do not know," he sighed deeply again. "But Louis Napoleon has an extraordinary power over women with his soft, calm ways. What if he discerned . . . what if he drew her into confessing . . . her secret, that she had an illegitimate child born in Italy? Something of the sort he hinted in that evasive way of his when he first told me of his discovery of you. What if that was the reason why she dared not accept his dazzling offer? The fear that a hideous scandal might one day arise to sully their throne? . . . Ah! my child!" Orlando covered his face with his hand, "are you old enough to understand? . . . It wrings me still to think of her together with Napoleon. He is my Emperor, and," the old man's voice grew firmer, "he has no more loyal servant than myself. The Bonapartes have made all the fortune of the family of Caprano. While she," his voice grew deep and lugubrious, "for years before she died was dead to me . . . dead . . . dead." His voice rang mournfully through the silence of the splendid room. "And I am an old man in whom the passions, too, should be dead . . . But still it is too much for me . . . To think of her together with Louis Napoleon!"

"Ah!" exclaimed his son. "I could not understand, sir, why you looked at his Majesty for a moment in that way, bristling, as if you would have liked to strike him!"

"Did I?" asked Count Caprano in a voice of concern. "Did I so betray myself? . . . But that was bad, you know! Napoleon notices everything; he forgets nothing. He is not *méchant*; he is not vindictive; but he can be sullen . . . and he never forgets. Well, if I have lost favour by my looks," he smiled, "you must recover it for me by your loyalty!"

"I shall not forget what I owe to his Majesty," said Deodato fervently.

"Good! Very good! But I wish he had heard you say it. What is the profit in loyalty that is tongue-tied? Monarchs, my son, like to have devotion *shown* them. Find the chance to tell the Emperor your gratitude with the same honest simplicity that you showed just now in speaking to me . . . He will not forget that, either . . . Well," he resumed, "by whatever means Napoleon discovered who was your mother, he knew your father the moment he discovered my monogram sewn into your scapular . . . What a strange compunction on the part of Mabel—for I am sure it was she! At the very moment of abandoning you, to cut that crest from one of my pillow-cases, and leave, in the emblem of superstition fastened onto you by your Roman nurse, the hint that might some day permit you to know your father . . . but not your mother! Ah! how clever she was, Mabel! But how hard . . . *mon Dieu*, how hard!"

"Nevertheless," objected Deodato gently, "she had another hour of weakening—when she sent her lawyer to Italy on a feigned pretext to enquire after me. That clue, also, I gave the Emperor."

"He would have found his own clues if you had had none to offer," grunted Orlando. "He needs no help in discovering what he wants to know . . . Napoleon is always working . . . working like a mole in the dark, and no one knows at any moment where he will emerge . . . Europe does not know . . . and that is why Europe in these days is always unquiet . . . Oh! I am a very loyal subject. . . . But nevertheless what I say is true. He is loquacious and silent, swift and tortuous . . . all at once, like the conspirator he was trained to be. He would have discovered your secret without your help."

"So Mr. Marsh said!" murmured Deodato.

"Who is that—Monsieur Marsh?" enquired his father, smiling; but when Deodato began to tell him he fidgeted and frowned. "Such persons were no companions for my son!" he said irritably, and when Deodato spoke of the poisoning of Marsh:

"*Basta! Basta!*" he cried in Italian, with a gesture of his refined little hands, "what horrors! A gentleman does not speak of them . . . in my salon . . . *fi, donc!* . . . To think my son should have passed through such scenes!"

"The poor man," remonstrated Deodato rather doggedly, "was my first good friend, sir!"

"We will find you better ones!" declared his father. "There is only one place for a son of mine, the Army!"

"The Army!" Deodato blinked.

"Do not look so dismayed! We shall not make you a *piéton*, a mud-crusher!" Orlando chuckled. "Anyone would think from your look that you had drawn a bad number in the conscription! No. A commission in some *corps d'élite*, what do you say to that?"

"I . . . I . . . have never thought of a military life, sir. I am not sure it would suit me."

"Well, but *mon Dieu!* you must have some rank! You cannot be an idle man-about-town, a *petit-crevé*, my son! What were you brought up to?"

"To be a friar!"

Orlando grimaced. "Then," pursued his son, "I was trained as a sort of mason."

"*Assez! Assez!* No more of that!"

"But what I wish to be is an artist."

"An artist?" Orlando seemed bewildered.

"A sculptor!"

"A gentleman sculptor? I have never heard of such a thing.

Deodato shrugged his shoulders. "*C'est mon métier, Monsieur.*"

"A gentleman has no *métier*. Or only one . . . the Army."

Deodato was silent. His father eyed him with curiosity. "Can you model? Have you really the gift of a sculptor? My son! It's hardly possible!"

"But, sir, you surely are an artist!" Deodato waved his hand towards the picture gallery, its colours now swimming in the sunset light through the western windows.

"I am a connoisseur," replied the Count haughtily, "which is a very different thing," Then he laughed. "You are really rather charming, my son! You know nothing of life . . . nothing whatsoever . . . And yet I am not sure," he tapped his teeth with his spectacles, which he had removed for a moment. "I am not sure that your naïveté may not make you as big a success at Court as sophistication could . . . Something fresh . . . quite green . . . what will her Imperial Majesty make of that? . . . I wonder . . . I wonder. There is nothing plebeian about you, certainly. You have been *dégrossi* by the fingers of Nature herself, as it were.

And you are handsome, too." He seemed to say this without much satisfaction. "Yes, you are undeniably handsome. The women will take to you. . . . I feel it already . . . they will take to you. They will consider you *sympathique* . . . They prefer the naïf to the cultivated . . . they will call you an adorable savage." There was an irony in his tone that made Deodato quite uncomfortable.

"Well," he resumed, after a pause during which he had been swinging his spectacles to and fro and looking at his son sidelong in the gathering dusk, "sculpture is a very respectable hobby for a gentleman. It is better than cards, racing . . . or *la femme*! After all, what is there for an officer to do in peacetime but amuse himself? If you have any talent in the way of sculpture—and I believe I can give you a very good opinion on that, for I am in truth a connoisseur, I have à Canova in the entrance-hall—why then we will get some masters to give you lessons. To be able to make a medallion of a pretty face may be a social advantage even to a Lieutenant of the Guides or the Dragoons of the Empress."

Deodato passed his hands through the clusters of curls over his temples, bewildered by all these suggestions. Orlando laughed. "Naturally," he said, "you do not know where you are . . . scarcely yet who you are. There will be time to decide these matters. A commission in the Guard, that is not gained in twenty-four hours, even by my son, let me assure you! . . . You will have leisure to grow accustomed to your new station, to wear your clothes as if they belonged to you, to tie your cravat better than that!" He laughed whimsically. "Your next campaign, my friend, will be at the Emperor's reception on Friday, and you must prepare for it—you must learn quickly to speak better French! It is always a mistake to go to Court unprepared. One never knows what opportunity may be missed. One should study the map beforehand. Who will be there, and who is at the moment in favour or out of favour? What is such a one desiring, and such a one fearing? Who hates who . . . to-day, and what quarrels are likely to be made up . . . to-morrow. What liaisons are still enduring—fatal to make a mistake on that article!—and, it is almost as important, who has fallen out of love with who? Well, I will be your guide at starting, never fear!"

Into the room came the maître d'hôtel in black and bowed low. "*M. le Comte est servi*," he announced.

"Dinner!" cried the Count joyously, and held out his arm to be

helped from his chair. "No, Germain," he said to the servant. "Not you any longer! *Monsieur mon neveu* will do that for me henceforth."

For a second Deodato was confused; then he remembered that among the countless things he had been told was that at the Emperor's suggestion he was to be presented at Court and in Society as Count Caprano's nephew from Italy.

He gave his father his arm and they crossed the hall together to the dining-room, the maître d'hotel preceding them and throwing open the folding-doors.

The curtains had been drawn, and the spacious white and gold apartment was filled with a subdued glow from bronze tripods in niches, skilfully adapted to gas-lighting. Empty except for two footmen in powder and green liveries standing in front of a side-board laden with china fruit-stands, it had something of the solemnity of a temple, with the marble statue of Bacchus in the niche at the far end as the presiding deity. The dining-table, however, was gay with flowers between its glittering ormolu épergnes, and the panels of the doors when closed were seen to be decorated with choric lines of Pompeian dancers like Parisian ladies in antique garb.

As the youth who had waited on the friars in the bare refectory of San Francesco, and sat in the kitchen in the New Road to receive his portion from the hands of Mrs. Marsh, walked to his place opposite his father, a footman stood by his chair and bowed to him.

THE SALON D'APOLLON

(1)

THE next afternoon Count Caprano took his "nephew" to drive with him in the Bois de Boulogne. The return of the Court to Paris, to celebrate the arrival of the troops from Italy, had brought the world of fashion, also, back to town, and there was an unusual display, for the month of August, in the green alleys and round the lake. Against this summer tapestry of foliage there moved a mass of carriages and riders, the crested panels of the barouches gleaming, the cockaded coachmen and the footmen with crossed arms sitting erect like solemn statues on the boxes, the veils of the top-hatted Amazons fluttering and the spurs of their grey-trouseried escorts shining, as their spirited mounts danced past the stately trot of the carriage-horses.

Deodato was enthralled by the cavalcade. Bays, chestnuts or greys, all were groomed to the top pitch of perfection as they passed to the clink of bits, the beat of hoofs, the subdued roar of wheels in the afternoon sunshine. They took shape for Deodato as a pulsing frieze of limb and muscle, their tossing manes and slim legs masking power in elegance, and stirring in him a strange exhilaration.

Presently he began to notice with some awkwardness the number of acquaintances to whom his father bowed, and to wonder whether he ought to bow too, or to take no notice, not having been presented. He decided at length that it would be right for him to raise his own hat whenever his father did. And doing so he could not help noticing how many glances the ladies shot at him under their parasols, and presently in his embarrassment he began to blush.

"You see," said Orlando smiling, with pride, "people begin to notice you at once, *mon neveu*. Nobody drives with me without being noticed. And, as I foretold, the women seize upon you. . . . You must have a care about that! Yes, *crédieu*! We must keep watch on you about that!" He gave a dry, half-hostile laugh.

They had made the round of the lake once, and were turning towards home when an excited murmur ran through the crowd, drowning the noise of the wheels. At the same time the coachmen looked over their shoulders and began to pull into the sides of the road, the equestrians to range themselves in ranks on either hand.

Count Orlando turned round in his seat and peered through his gold spectacles, holding them close to his eyes with his hand. "Who is it?" he exclaimed. "The Emperor? No! It is her Majesty!"

Waving his hand with a regular gesture to warn the traffic, an out-rider in top-boots, green coat and velvet hunting-cap came trotting down the middle of the drive. Some fifty yards behind him followed an open carriage drawn by four horses ridden by postilions in the same green livery and powder. Hats were lifted, and there was a murmur of acclamation as this equipage bowled along the cleared way down the centre of the road, and Deodato stared out eagerly as it approached the spot where his father's carriage was halted.

Nearest him in the back seat of the daumont was a slender woman with her head enhaloed by a black bonnet with a single pink flower in it, which threw into relief the white forehead enclosed at the temples by bands of brown hair shot with gold. The arch of the thin black eyebrows, the classically perfect nose, the long cupid's-bow mouth made a profile like a cameo, framed in the rim of the bonnet and the ribbons tied high under the point of the chin.

Deodato drew in his breath at the spectacle of the little Spanish Countess who had made herself Empress of the French; and then, as Eugénie, with a swan-like inclination of her head, turned to acknowledge the plaudits on his side of the road, he was dazzled by the gleam of the blue eyes skilfully set off by a pencilled black line along the almond-shaped lower lids. Smoothly to the whirl of the light daumont wheels the vision sped by, ineffably imperial in the upright poise of the bust from the supple waist; and Deodato, trying to follow it with his eye, hardly observed the lady-in-waiting on the other side of the Empress, or the equerry riding by the wheel, or the second carriage, with another lady sitting beside an aged and bent Chamberlain . . . still less the unobtrusive coupé that followed at a little distance behind, from which the sharp eyes of the Chief of the Secret Police kept watch upon the crowd.

But a minute later, as the wheels of the waiting equipages began to revolve again, and the equestrians to break rank, and the stationary throng on the side-walks to melt into a shifting mass marking time to extricate itself, he saw striding along the edge of the footpath in the narrow gap between the pedestrians and the carriages, the figure of Piero Santacrose, wrapped, despite the heat, in a long caped overcoat that hid his mutilation. His face was set and his eyes burning, and he appeared to be making after the Empress's carriage.

Deodato's heart seemed to stop. Terror and discretion struggled within him, and locked him in the state of a dreamer whose voice and limbs alike refuse obedience. He tried to throw out his arm, but it only jerked by his side. He tried to shout, "Stop that man!"; but only a whisper came from his lips, to be lost in the murmur of the dispersing crowd and the grinding of the wheels.

"What do you say?" enquired his father, smiling. "Come, pull yourself together, my friend! . . . What! Has the Empress pierced you to the heart with her beauty? You are not the only one! But, let me tell you that many people would give a year of their income for such a glance as she sent you in passing . . . I see, *ma foi*, that there are more ways than one of playing the courtier! Do you know you were the only man in the Bois with his hat on when she went by? But it was plain from your face why you had forgotten your hat . . . and everything else too . . . and I am sure that she forgave you . . . What is the matter with you, boy?" he added irritably, as Deodato did not answer. "Drive on, Antoine! . . . Why are you staring at those people passing by?" he asked Deodato.

"Pardon, sir! I . . . I saw a gentleman I know."

"What gentlemen can you know in Paris? Gentlemen who cannot afford even a *fiacre* to come to the Bois?"

Deodato sank slowly back upon the cushion of his seat. The Empress's cortège had been for some while now out of sight, and Piero too had disappeared. Deodato had heard no sound . . . no explosion, no hubbub. Ludovica's brother could not have been meditating any outrage . . . at this moment . . . Deodato looked at his father and apologised again with a smile. "It was a gentleman, sir, I knew in Rome . . . oh, very slightly . . . and I was surprised to catch sight of him again down there."

"An Italian gentleman, you say? What is his name?"

"I do not know what he calls himself."

"Indeed?" Orlando raised his eyebrows. "Evidently a very slight acquaintance. So much the better! We may meet your friend, of course, at Court or in some good house. If not," Orlando made a precise little gesture with his gloved hand, "he is better dropped. You will make too many friends worth cultivating to have time to waste on useless chance acquaintances."

"Indeed, sir?"

"Say, *mon oncle*. You had better get used to it, *Monsieur mon neveu* . . . Remember you are my sister's son from Italy. It is the Emperor's will. He desires no complications with my brother's family in Russia. Therefore again, you are the child of my sister, who married a cousin of our name in Italy . . . I never had a sister, but the Emperor has created her! *Il a bien le droit, je pense!*"

(2)

And the next night when they went together to the Tuileries, as the Emperor had commanded, Deodato was to realise the wisdom of this advice.

He had entered the palace, this time by the main entry to the Court of the Carrousel and by the Staircase of Honour under the Pavilion of the Clock, garnished with lackeys and ushers, in a state of considerable trepidation. He had been made, before coming, to parade in his Court dress with knee-breeches, which had been ordered for him in haste the first morning of his residence at Cythère, under the eye of his father and his father's valet, and had given little satisfaction. Twenty times he had been forced by Orlando to go through the motions of bowing, placing a chair for a lady and folding his crush-hat under his arm, and he did not know which made him feel more awkward, his father's testy reprimands or Gustave the valet's deferential "*Si Monsieur veut bien me permettre*—" as he assured the hang of his tails or set his white cravat to rights. Orlando had concluded gloomily that an education could not be improvised, and that *mon neveu* had, at best, the deportment of a *hobereau*, a squireen.

Now, standing with the other after-dinner guests awaiting the Emperor's entry in the Salon d'Apollon, he had to fortify himself

by keeping in mind that his father had anyhow admitted that his face was *sympathique*. The huge drawing-room, dating from the reign of Louis XIV but now redecorated in the full flamboyance of Second Empire style, seemed to be labouring to overpower him. The three colossal chandeliers, sending back their glitter reduplicated from the immense mirrors, the crowded sculpture weighing down the cornices, the vast mythological oil-paintings that coloured the walls and ceiling, the gilding laid on every surface from the frieze to the backs of the chairs, the white and crimson glare of the silken furniture-coverings, culminating in the great central pouf with its crown of flowers, all had a brilliance without repose, a self-conscious pomp. It was as though the whole salon had been examined for fear some inch of it might be left uncoloured or ungilded.

From time to time Deodato's thoughts were distracted from his own deficiencies by his father's low voice pointing out some celebrity among the waiting throng beneath the chandeliers. "Look!" he said, "there is one of the most important men in the Empire just coming in at the doors. It is Morny . . . You have heard of the Duc de Morny, I suppose?" and as Deodato looked towards the elegant gentleman with the bald domed forehead and the beard and moustaches cut so as to accentuate his resemblance to the Emperor, Orlando added, "I wonder he has not been dining with his Majesty . . . but I daresay he has been somewhere he finds more amusing. Morny, *mon neveu*, has his finger in every pie, political, financial, theatrical. He likes to pose as the mere man of pleasure, but he is the Emperor's coolest, as well as most daring, adviser." He dropped his voice to a whisper. "Without Morny Napoleon would never have made the *coup d'état* . . . and it is only fair he should profit by the exaltation of . . . his brother."

"His brother, sir?"

Orlando laid his finger on his lips and nodded.

"But how can that be?" whispered Deodato.

"Oh! quite naturally, he says." Orlando's mouth curved in a smile of malice. "See the *hortensia* in his button-hole? . . . That little old man, edging up already to the Emperor's fauteuil by the fireplace, is General Sertignes de Messimy, one of the most important and indispensable of nonentities. But look now, crossing the floor yonder is somebody who really matters! Count Nigra, envoy of

the triumphant King Victor Emmanuel. He always reminds me of an operatic tenor with that flowing moustache . . . but don't mistake him; he is as strong as he is supple! . . . Ah! *bon soir, M. le Ministre.*" Orlando bowed to M. Rouher, who had come up to greet him with an ambiguous smile. M. Rouher desired the honour of presentation to the nephew of *M. le Comte*, and begged to congratulate the blushing Deodato with speculative eyes.

As the politician passed away, Orlando greeted a foppish-looking, fair young man in the blue tail-coat with white satin facings worn by members of the Imperial Household. It was the Marquis de Vaulancourt, holder of some minor, honorary Court post in virtue of his being a *rallié* from the old royalist aristocracy. With him was a short, squat man in General's uniform, whose high cheekbones and drooping black moustaches gave him an odd resemblance to a Chinese mandarin. Count Caprano introduced his "nephew" to the Marquis, and then to the soldier, whose name Deodato could not catch; it sounded like "Bazin" (or perhaps "Bazaine"). He seemed an affable little man, anyhow, and smiled politely over the presentation.

"How is Loulou getting on?" inquired Orlando of Vaulancourt, who was a repertory of Court gossip. There had been a rumour that the little Prince Imperial was in bad health, but Vaulancourt assured them that it was only a cold. "I got it from Miss Shaw herself—a feat of courage," he said, with a grimace at the name of the redoubtable English governess of the heir to the throne.

At that moment the folding doors at the end of the room were thrown open by the chief usher announcing in a resonant voice, "The Emperor!" and preceded by the Prefect of the Palace in purple and gold, Napoleon appeared with the Empress on his arm.

Behind him came a blaze of uniforms that seemed to aim at quenching even the extravagant colours of the salon itself. There was the resplendent Adjutant-General of the Palace, the Chamberlain-in-Waiting in scarlet, the Equerry in green and gold, the two Orderly Officers of the day in pale-blue and silver, and behind these regular officials a galaxy of military uniforms, mingling with the foaming flounces and jewels of the ladies-in-waiting and other feminine guests who had been dining at the Imperial table.

Count Orlando murmured some further scraps of information into

Deodato's ears as the procession welled into the room. "Look!" he said, "two Marshals, Mac-Mahon and Canrobert! . . . And there at the back . . . do you see him? . . . Dr. Conneau, the Emperor's old friend, who helped him to escape from his prison at Ham . . . there is a living page of history for you!"

Deodato, however, had eyes only for the Emperor, who in his black evening coat and breeches, with no colour to his costume except the *grand cordon* of the Legion of Honour barring his shirt-front with a wide red streak, seemed to him a far more dignified figure than the somnolent creature he had seen propped up against the cushions of the arm-chair in his cabinet. Like an accomplished actor, Napoleon seemed to draw vigour from his audience. His step was slow and dignified, despite his short legs and a tendency to waver in his walk; his wide, intellectual brow beamed serenely; a tranquil benevolence pervaded the bearded countenance on which his barber and private valet had been busily at work before producing him to his Court. . . . Without knowing it, too, Deodato was now seeing the monarch through the loyal Bonapartist spectacles that his father had been carefully fitting to his sight in their talks of the last few days. In place of the terror of democratic Europe, Deodato now saw the Providential personage who had saved his nation from anarchy by instituting a dictatorship of one man chosen by the people for the people; who had opened an epoch of unparalleled prosperity for France (Deodato had seen that with his own eyes) and had raised her arms to a pinnacle of power before which her formerly exultant enemies now stood trembling.

Deodato had been taught, too, that the *coup d'état* was the courageous act of a man striking order out of chaos at the risk of his own head, and the "massacres" of December no more than a vigorous police-action clearing the boulevards of the enemies of society. . . . And when to this was added his personal gratitude to "Monsieur Charles" for raising him from squalor and destitution to a future of which the brightness still confused him, it was not surprising that the Emperor had no more loyal servitor in the room to-night than the young Italian who hung upon his approaching steps with a look of almost religious devotion.

The Imperial couple were making a slow tour of the unwinkingly dazzling salon to receive the homage of those of their guests who had not shared the honour of dining at their table, speaking to each

a few gracious words of recognition. After acknowledging the profound bow of Count Caprano, the Emperor said, twisting his moustache, "So, this, my dear Count, is the nephew of whom you spoke to me?"

"Your majesty had the infinite kindness to command me to bring him to your reception this evening," answered Orlando in a voice that seemed steeped in honey.

Napoleon turned his head, the greying hairs of which, despite all his valet's attentions, rather untidily brushed his collar, and murmured something softly to the Empress, who smiled with quick, rather nervous brilliance. She was standing beside him, looking as exquisite in her maize-coloured silk dress of many flounces, with a circlet of diamonds in her hair, as she had done in the Bois the afternoon before—so thought Deodato.

The Emperor turned back to Count Caprano. "The young man is your brother's son, is he not?" he murmured vaguely.

"My sister's, sire!" corrected Orlando promptly, and from the flicker of the Emperor's lids Deodato realized that *mon oncle* had been prudently alert in giving Napoleon the right answer. He was determined to have his little fable correctly rendered to him—and he had been setting a mild trap for Orlando. What tortuous care to take over a tiny bit of deception like this!

Then Deodato saw Napoleon's veiled eyes fixed on himself. "We have a stout-looking young man here," he said thickly, as if he were chewing the words into his moustache. "He should follow the career of arms. . . . What do you think, my dear Count? Shall we try to find your nephew a commission in some good regiment? . . . What does Monsieur himself think?"

There was a moment's pause in which Deodato's dry throat hindered him from speaking. He saw the Emperor's face lengthen and his father look at him with an agitated jerk of his head, and realised that he was on the edge of a *gaffe*, through his silence. Desperately he forced his voice out, declaring in a tone that rang, "I could desire no higher destiny, sire, than to fight for your throne——"

"For France!" corrected the Emperor in a bored tone.

"To fight for France," repeated Deodato, "and," recklessness took possession of him, and he turned to the Empress, "to die, if I may, for her Majesty!"

"*Mais c'est charmant!*" cried Eugénie, "I have a proper

paladin!" The touch of Spanish roughness in her voice gave it, to Deodato's ears, an extra fascination. It seemed, like a sharp condiment, to give piquancy to her formal beauty. "*Charmant, charmant!*" she repeated, smiling at Deodato, and abruptly, shifting the bouquet that she carried into her left hand, held out the other for him to kiss—a mark of favour which she rarely accorded, and which was not lost on the watching eyes of the courtiers.

Napoleon, meanwhile, was twisting his moustaches with a pleased expression—happy, like any lazy husband, to find his wife put in a good humour by a compliment from somebody else. "*My chevalier,*" Eugénie turned on him with a darting movement like a bird, "should be allowed, sire, to join my Dragoons . . . not any other regiment!"

"*Sans doute! sans doute!*" replied the Emperor courteously. "We must see what can be done for him . . . we must see where we can place him."

"But in the Dragoons of the Guard!" repeated Eugénie, a little irritably.

"The Guard, the Guard! That is a great thing—the Guard!" said Napoleon in a soft tone. "The young man must give proofs. . . . However," he added, observing through his half-shut lids an exasperated look coming into his consort's face, which accentuated a certain heaviness round the jaws, "I know it is your own regiment. . . . *Enfin, nous verrons!*"

He turned with a rather wavering movement to go on to the next guest, and as he did so, Eugénie said to Deodato, "We saw you in the Bois yesterday, *Monsieur le Paladin!* You evidently wished to draw our attention to your need of a warrior's helmet!" and, with a further flash of her brilliant smile, she passed on to greet another of her visitors with that swan-like bend of her lovely neck.

Deodato found his father regarding him with a sort of awe. "I never," he murmured, "saw a fellow fish himself out of a hole with such audacity as yours, *Monsieur mon neveu!* . . . Oh! I see your policy! . . . Lacking etiquette, you mean to push your way, do you, by calculated *maladresse?* . . . *Non! mais c'est vraiment très fort!* . . . and you go for the woman at once! My congratulations!" But somehow Deodato thought his father was not particularly pleased.

(3)

There was now a certain relaxation in the assembly. The Sovereigns had seated themselves, one on each side of the sculptured fireplace, now filled with summer flowers, and the Empress had given the signal that the other ladies present might sit also. There was a rustling movement to occupy the dumpy sofas and poufs, which offered a comfort lacking in the stiff Louis XIV arm-chairs that still made part of the furnishing of the room. The gentlemen resigned themselves to an evening of standing on feet wrung by patent leather or gout, the more practised ones edging themselves into corners where they could, without being observed, lean up against walls or backs of chairs. Footmen handed round coffee on trays that shone like silver but were really plated.

Deodato saw that both Emperor and Empress had started games. Eugénie, with her ladies-in-waiting grouped round her like a garden of richly-coloured flowers, was rattling the dice to start a game of loto; Napoleon, before whom a green card-table had been opened by the lackeys, was shuffling a card-pack, before embarking upon a solitary patience, watched over his shoulder by the Household officials, Orderly Officers, and a few privileged guests, of whom he deigned now and again to ask a word of advice. The heat increased; the gas-jets in milky globes, which aided the chandeliers, whistled softly; through the room ran a languid, respectful murmur of conversation, making a ground-tone to the delicate harshness of Eugénie's voice and laugh up at the far end. This typical "orgy" at the Tuileries might have been a slow-moving soirée in some respectable bourgeois household, but for the tasteless splendours of its setting. . . . And then Deodato recalled how tremulously Europe waited on the thoughts that were going on behind the wide forehead, crossed at this moment again by a lock of grey hair, which was bent over the card-table, while its owner stroked his beard slowly downwards.

Count Caprano had manœuvred himself and his "nephew" into the embrasure of one of the long windows, where behind the white-fringed crimson curtain he was enabled unseen to rest his old body upon a ledge of the window-frame. Here they found themselves once more close to the Marquis de Vaulancourt and the little General with the Chinese face. They dropped into subdued conversation.

"No table-turning this evening, Marquis?" inquired Orlando.

"No, Count," returned Vaulancourt, "not for a long while, I think, after what happened the other night at Saint-Cloud."

"Why, what was that?" Orlando straightened himself, revived by the prospect of a Court scandal.

"A fine business!" Vaulancourt stroked his fluffy, fair moustache with a disagreeable look. "The General was there, and can bear me out that it was all most unpleasant."

The soldier nodded; there was a satirical look in his little gimlet-like black eyes.

"Come! Tell us!" pleaded Orlando, like a child. "Come behind the curtain here! Nobody can hear you!"

Vaulancourt lifted his eyebrows with a sort of weary distaste. Then he shrugged his shoulders and moved into the embrasure.

"It was that rogue Hume . . . Home . . . what do they call him? The Scotchman."

"I know . . . I know . . . the medium!" Orlando nodded with glistening eyes.

"There were about a dozen of us present, including his Majesty and her Majesty, in the tapestried room she likes so much, with the figure of Marie Antoinette on the hangings. It appears," Vaulancourt smiled ironically, "that the spirits dislike a crowd. Also that they shrink from the light, for the lamps, as always, were turned low. Well, there was the usual nonsense. . . . You know what it is like. The table rising into the air and standing on a slant, while Hume snores in a trance . . . so he says. A musical box played tunes without being set going, and then came the familiar rappings announcing the arrival of the spirits. Bacciochi, the Chamberlain, spelt out the messages for us. The first shade from the Beyond announced himself as Molière, and when the Emperor asked him which of his comedies he himself preferred, he replied, 'Les Plaideurs.' . . . Somewhat unfortunate!" The Marquis again smiled sourly. . . . "This inaccurate classic was followed by a noble Huron or Iroquois. . . . I don't know which . . . who said he called himself Red Bull, and was as inarticulate as an animal. . . . utterly unintelligible ravings. I could tell that his Majesty was getting bored. I could see him in the gloom stroking his beard downwards . . . you know that is a bad sign. He half-rose from his chair as if to break up this séance of the absurd . . . then something that was certainly odd happened."

Vaulancourt smoothed his moustache reflectively. "The musical box began to play again . . . of its own accord. And the tune it played was . . . 'Partant pour la Syrie' . . . Queen Hortense's anthem. I don't know how that trick was worked, because, you see, I know that musical box. . . . It dates from Marie Antoinette—the Château is still full of her toys—and it could not have 'Partant pour la Syrie' in its mechanism.

"*C'est curieux!*" murmured Orlando.

"So the Emperor evidently thought, for he sat down again. Then the rapping recommenced, very loud, and Bacciochi, in a rather trembling voice, announced to the Emperor, 'The spirit says it is her Majesty your Mother, Queen Hortense.'"

"I think," interjected Orlando, "that M. Hume has a pretty impudence!"

"I think so, too," said the Marquis. "Still, it was undeniably very queer. For just at that moment the tablecloth began to stir and ripple, as if a hand were moving about underneath it——"

"Ah! but whose hand?" asked Orlando. "Does M. Hume really sleep on these occasions?"

"Who can say? But it was not his hand this time, at any rate. For it appeared above the tablecloth in a sort of bluish light. A woman's hand, Count, and I heard the Emperor say to her Majesty with a gasp, 'Look! Look at the ring, Eugénie! It is my mother's ring!' . . . And at that the hand picked up the pencil and wrote upon the pad there, 'Hortense.' That was the word; I saw it afterwards."

"Well," Orlando shrugged his shoulders, "I don't know what to think!"

"That isn't all. The worst is to come. The rapping began again, fast and furious . . . and poor Bacciochi, after counting the taps, had to read out to us all assembled there, 'My son, my dear son, in the hour of victory, beware! Make no more wars! Judas is in the room with you, who will drag your crown in the mire! What do you think of that, Count? Judas!'"

"I would have had M. Hume beaten by the footmen."

Vaulancourt shook his head. "That wasn't the way the Emperor took it. I heard him give a kind of groan; then a chair was overturned, and her Majesty called, 'Lights! Lights! Turn on the gas!' Bacciochi rushed to obey her, and when he had done so

we saw that the Emperor had fled from the room! Her Majesty swept out after him, looking like a ghost herself; and they woke up the medium and bundled him, half stupefied, out of the palace by a side door. Then . . . well . . . then . . . it was very awkward, you know. The rest of us stood looking at each other. . . and we couldn't help wondering. Marshal Macmahon, who"—Vaulancourt's voice dropped—"is in reality a partisan of the Orleans family, looked sidelong at Morny, who, as you know, actually resigned his post when the Emperor confiscated the goods of the Orleans Princes. Then Morny had the effrontery to smile at me—I suppose because my father was one of the bodyguards of Charles X. And several of us couldn't help a glance at Rouher, who was a Minister under the Republic and is far too shrewd a barrister not to be always on the winning side. Suddenly, and, believe me, we were very grateful to him, old Canrobert shook that lion's mane of his and burst into a bellow of barrack-room laughter, in which we all quickly joined . . . and that was the end of it. . . Judas, indeed! . . . It was pretty strong—wasn't it, General?"

"*Fort embêtant*," assented Bazin (or Bazaine) with a smile.

(4)

Suddenly Deodato saw the Chamberlain-in-Waiting making his way through the throng, looking from side to side, and to his amazement the splendid official came straight to the embrasure where he stood with his father, and stopped before him.

"M. Caprano," he said, "the Empress does you the honour to desire to speak to you. Pray do not keep her Majesty waiting."

Count Orlando, who had been saying something almost in a whisper to Vaulancourt, turned round with a look of surprise, and Deodato saw the Marquis give him a glance of peevish jealousy. But he had to hurry off behind the red tails and swinging sword of the official. Arrived before the Empress's arm-chair he bowed low, and waited to be spoken to.

He was awkwardly conscious of the bevy of magnificent ladies-in-waiting surrounding Eugénie, superb, full-blown flowers, most of them, in their rose-shaped crinolines, with their large white shoulders,

deep bosoms, and elaborate curls falling on each side of the face. They partook of the spirit of the apartment which they adorned, unashamedly female, ostentatious of their wealth, confident of their power to subjugate and charm. To the judgment of this awe-inspiring jury the Empress now submitted the blushing young man. "Here," she said gaily, "is the gentleman who aspires to be an officer of my Dragoons? What do you say, ladies? Shall we award him . . . that is to say," she hurriedly corrected herself, "shall we ask his Majesty to award him the brevet?"

"If Monsieur has your Majesty's suffrage, what need can he have of ours?" asked the Princesse d'Essling, Grand Mistress of the Household, in a stately tone.

"I would not be so cruel as to refuse him the privilege of dying for your Majesty," said the Marquise de Latour-Maubourg, with a malicious glance at his blushes.

"I would claim him for myself—if I were Colonel of a Regiment!" declared the Comtesse de la Bédoyère, with a pretty pertness.

"But since it would be vain for us to seek to dispute him with your Majesty," sighed the Baronne de Malaret, with a shrug of her famous shoulders, "we must cede him to you!"

"Only my vote is left then!" cried the Empress, laughing at the flattery. She rattled the dice-box. "Shall I remit it to fortune?" she asked, darting her blue, almond-shaped eyes round the circle, and seeming to make all those other fair flowers fade in her own brilliance.

"Never trust fortune, your Majesty, till you have loaded the dice!" cried a voice behind the Empress's chair, and Deodato, looking over Eugénie's head, found himself returning the stare of a pale young woman with enormous eyes, the colour of a purplish plum, under heavy black brows with an almost diabolical point. Her head was surrounded by a night-cloud of black hair, through the mist of which an exquisite, pointed ear gleamed with a faun-like outline.

The lower part of the pale face, however, was disfigured by lips as thick as a negress's, and round this ugly mouth there ran premature lines that contrasted with the smoothness of the low forehead.

As this newcomer came round and curtsied to the Empress, Deodato noticed the tallness of her slim figure and the easy, almost athletic, grace of her movement. Napoleon, at the sight of her,

raised his head from his patience, and drawled, "What was that you said, my dear Ambassadors?"

The dark woman curtsied to him in his turn, and repeated her remark, laughing. Napoleon leaned back, twisting his moustache. "You seem to me inconsistent, Princess Waldoz," he murmured. "To entrust oneself to fortune, to one's Destiny, that is well. But to try to load the dice, as you suggest, that is to interfere with your star. Believe me, it can only lead to disaster. . . . Yes, Baron?"

While he was speaking Napoleon had, without seeming to notice what he was doing, moved a card on to another in the game laid out before him, and the gold-and-amaranthine Prefect of the Palace had almost involuntarily put out a white-gloved hand. "Well?" asked the Emperor.

"I humbly beg your Majesty's pardon," murmured the Prefect. "Your Majesty's last move . . . it . . . it . . . is against the rules of this particular patience. . . . I . . . I only feared that your Majesty's game might be spoiled," he added humbly.

Napoleon looked sourly at the lay-out of the cards. "Now I cannot work it out," he mumbled into his beard. "Was it necessary to insist upon such a little irregularity? . . . How can one do anything, great or small, in the world without just a suspicion of *tricherie*, eh, my dear Baron?" The official, as purple as his own coat, apologised again.

"It does not matter in the least," drawled Napoleon, with a good-humoured smile piercing through his annoyance. He lit a cigarette from a match held by the Chamberlain, and added, "Remember though, Baron, that only I know when my game is being spoiled and when it is being forwarded."

Meanwhile, the Empress and her ladies were listening, as if under a spell, to a series of caustic comments on men and matters of the day from the ugly lips of Princess Clementine Waldoz, the Carpatho-Croatian Ambassadors. It was plain enough, as she relished her own gossip, how those disfiguring, almost grim, lines had come into being round her mouth. Eugénie leaned back, shaken with laughter at the Ambassadors's quips and stabs, her handkerchief held before her mouth, a trifle forgetful of her dignity in her enjoyment. The ladies-in-waiting duly showed themselves amused, since their imperial mistress was, but there was hostility in the eyes of several.

"Come, Clementine," said Eugénie at length, "you had better sit down and join our *loto*. Otherwise there will not be a reputation left in Paris. I ought not to listen to you really."

"I trust I have not been boring your Majesty?"

"Boring me! *Ah! mon Dieu!* The Empress began to laugh again; then checked herself. "Come now," she said, "let us be serious! We will start the game again for Clementine's benefit." She pushed over a handful of counters towards the Princess, and as she did so saw Deodato, standing awkwardly and stiffly where she had dropped him out of the conversation. "*Mon Dieu!*" she exclaimed again. "There, all this time, is my poor *chevalier* . . . my poor cadet. Princess Waldoz, I present to you Monsieur Caprano, nephew of Count Caprano, who is to bear arms in my service."

"In the Cent-Gardes?" inquired the Princess innocently, lifting a corner of her heavy eyebrows, and indicating with just the suspicion of a gesture Deodato's rigid posture.

"*Méchante!*" laughed Eugénie. "You can see he is no six-foot ramrod. He will enter my Dragoons, of course. M. Caprano, stay beside me and advise me how to play. . . . You have never played *loto*? Then stay and take a lesson."

The game proceeded for a few minutes; then Eugénie looked up at the marble and bronze clock upon the mantelpiece. "Where can the Duchess of Smolensk be?" she asked sharply. "Is she going to be away all night?"

"The house was far away on the Left Bank, Madame, was it not?" suggested the Princesse d'Essling. "In those poor quarters one does not always find one's way."

"I can always find my way," answered the Empress, "although I have to wear blue spectacles when I am out on these rounds. She is not an Empress, and has no need to disguise herself to distribute a handful of napoleons to a distressed family."

"The Duchess is very conscientious in her discharge of these missions," pleaded the Mistress of the Household. "She makes all inquiries, and takes every pains."

"No doubt," said the Empress indifferently, drawing a counter from the bag. "She should have been the Superior of a Convent, I think."

Clementine Waldoz emitted a slight cough, and put a tiny lace handkerchief to her lips. Over the edge of it she glanced at the

Empress with a look of irresistible drollery. "*Ce pauvre Duc!*" she said. "Would your Majesty really have the heart to deprive" . . . she coughed again . . . "Smolensk . . . of a beauty after which all the world is sighing?"

Eugénie rattled the dice-box loudly, pretending not to hear her. But at Clementine's first, significant cough she had shot her a glance of Spanish vindictiveness which darkened her blue eyes, while for a moment again the heaviness round the jaws gave her face an ageing look. There was an embarrassed silence of some minutes while the loto continued.

Then, "Madame," said the Baroness de Malaret, "here is the Duchess."

CHAPTER FOUR

THE DUCHESS

(I)

A SIDE-DOOR in the wall behind the Empress's chair had been opened by one of the ushers, and Deodato, with eyes starting as if he had seen a spirit, beheld Ludovica entering the salon, dressed with the utmost simplicity in white.

Her bands of golden hair, as heavy-looking as if they consisted of the precious metal itself, were drawn down rippling on either side of her forehead, without curls, and gathered at the back of her neck by a plain ribbon only. The sole ornament of her whole toilette was a magnificent pearl necklace, making a triple chain round her powerful, beautifully moulded throat, underneath which could just be discerned a slender gold chain supporting some object concealed beneath her bodice. Eugénie herself wore no such jewel as that regal necklace, and as she glanced at her belated lady-in-waiting, it could be discerned that she disliked the splendour of the pearls as much as the plainness of the dress.

"You come very late, *Mme. la Duchesse*," she said curtly, as she bent over the loto board once more.

"I beg your Majesty to pardon me," answered Ludovica; "I had to dress before waiting on your Majesty." Her voice sounded toneless and fatigued. Deodato had already noticed that her face was pale, and it seemed to him to be wearing a look of repressed suffering.

"Your dressing will not have taken much time, I should have thought," said Eugénie, almost spitefully; and as Ludovica stood silent, her hands clasped resignedly over her fan, "Well," she added, with a touch of relenting, "those poor Labordes, how did you find them?"

"Ah! Madame," Ludovica raised her eyes with moisture in them, "it was truly pitiable! The father is a hopeless invalid . . . the mother, I am afraid, drinks. The children, there are five of

them, were in a state of absolute penury . . . scarcely a stitch to their backs. I myself took the man to a hospital in a *fiacre*. I judged there was no time to lose."

"That was right, quite right," the Empress nodded. "See how important it is, ladies, not to neglect any letter of appeal that one receives! One can never tell how truthful it may be." She turned to Ludovica again. "See that I have the Doctor's report in the morning. The woman should be visited by the *cure* of the parish where she lives, to see if she can be weaned from her bad ways; and when he has seen her he can become my almoner for the children."

"In all countries," interposed Clementine Waldoz, playing with the dice on the table, "the lower classes bring their own misfortunes on themselves by drunkenness."

"You do not know, Ambassadors," retorted Eugénie severely, "what it is to be poor. . . . Nor I, it is true; but I have made myself acquainted with the facts. The Emperor has done much to improve the lives of the working-people of his dominions . . . but there is still, alas! much misery . . . terrifying misery . . ." she let her voice sink, "misery of the kind that breeds revolt." For an instant she sat staring as if at some remote, disagreeable vision. Then, rousing herself, she added. "I am determined that my son, too, shall learn these facts from his own observation."

"Excellent! But one should be careful nevertheless, my dear Eugénie, of the *milieux* into which one introduces the heir to the throne." It was the voice of the Emperor. He had joined the group silently, stealthily as a ghost, and now addressed the Empress, though his eyes, as he twisted his moustache, were fixed on the Duchess of Smolensk.

"Your Majesty need have no fear of my allowing his Highness the Prince Imperial to run any risks," replied Eugénie with formal deference.

"Of course! Of course! I know how careful you are." Napoleon smiled amiably. "You must have had a painful task to perform, *Mme. la Duchesse*?"

Ludovica smiled palely. "It was a privilege to be allowed to succour such distress, sire, and I have to thank her Majesty for graciously giving me the opportunity."

Napoleon gave her another look through his half-closed lids, and seemed to be about to say something more. Instead, he put his

cigarette to his lips again, and after a moment's hesitation walked back with a wavering step to his solitary card-table.

Deodato, still pinned to his position by the Empress's chair, was staring as directly as he dared at Ludovica. At last his eyes again beheld her, as white, almost, to-night as the statue in Rome that had first brought them together, the heavy lids below the recessed brows drooping, like the statue's, to shield her eyes against the scintillation from the giant chandeliers, the sensitive, square-tipped fingers still patiently clasped round her fan.

Ah ! how she differed from the rest of the women there ! Fatigued, depressed, and, as it were quenched by her exhaustion, she yet made the others appear insignificant, for all their energy and high spirits, their forcedly bright eyes, discreet rouge and artificial smiles. She made shadows of them all, just as her simple white dress had eclipsed the many-coloured glow of their laces and silks, the purity of her pearls the iridescent flashing of their brooches and bracelets. The Empress herself was no more than a pretty Tanagra figurine beside her. Ludovica burned with life in her repose, and they, at the height of their vivacity, beside her were like puppets. All of them ? . . . As he turned away from Ludovica, after a prolonged failure to attract her look, his eye fell on one . . . and he hesitated.

Clementine Waldoz was lounging in her chair in an attitude that would not have been tolerated in anybody else in the presence of the Sovereign. But Clementine was a law to herself, and once, when Eugénie had caused a mild reprimand to be conveyed to her, she had enquired sweetly of the messenger whether she, a daughter of the oldest nobility of the Holy Roman Empire, was to take lessons in etiquette from *cette bourgeoise* ? She looked incredibly long and slender now, as she leaned back with her slim feet peeping from under the flounces of her mauve dress with its knots of cherry-coloured ribbon. Her neck and shoulder-blades, Deodato thought, were as thin as if they had been refined away by a carving-tool—was there indeed under her daringly low-cut corsage, under the foam of her petticoats, any body that could be grasped at all ?

The fingers of her tiny hands, slight as the petals of a chrysanthemum, restless as the antennæ of an insect, now drummed on the gilt arms of her chair, now fluttered up to her mouth or caressed the dainty, pointed ear, now darted out to mark some point in the game, which she was playing (so it seemed to Deodato) with about a quarter of her mind. Another quarter, flashing from the corner

of the lustrous purplish eyes, was following the movements of the assembly from one end of the long salon to the other, noting, registering, polishing barbs of sarcasm, as was plain from the intermittent twitching of those calmuck lips. And all the other half was bent upon Deodato, probing him with glances from under the diabolique eyebrows, reading his character, his feelings, divining, he felt uneasily, the whole truth of his history.

It almost made his head ache to look at her, so intense was the mental activity he could sense behind the smooth, low forehead—he wondered how she ever managed to sleep. “No, I was not a beggar in the streets!” he found himself retorting to her unspoken challenge, and at the same moment, “I win ten points, your Majesty!” declared Clementine in her faintly guttural, Teutonic French. Eugénie gave a little cry of dismay, and paid over a handful of the newly minted 50-centime pieces that formed the basis of the “extravagant gambling” of the Tuileries. “*Mille remerciements, Madame,*” said *la Waldoz* as she swept them with her white antennæ into her velvet bag—and all this time Deodato was aware that she had not taken her observation off him, and began to wonder if she was trying to hypnotise him.

In revolt he turned his head again sharply towards Ludovica. Some movement among the persons standing round the Empress had brought her a few steps nearer to Deodato, and as he looked towards her he saw her eyes, with their short-sighted intentness, fixed on him, while her brows drew together in perplexity. Deodato realised that she felt him to be familiar, but that something, probably his moustaches and little beard, was impeding her recognition. He smiled to encourage her, and in another moment saw that she knew who he was. Utter astonishment and the opening of her little scarlet mouth were followed by a warm smile and a faint flush upon the marble of her cheeks.

Deodato was so thrilled by this greeting that he actually took a step towards her; but was warned of the solecism of such an act in the Empress’s presence by a little frown on Ludovica’s part and a nervous lifting of one of her hands from her fan.

Slight as this gesture was, Eugénie perceived it, and looked over her shoulder to see to whom her lady-in-waiting had been signalling. Deodato, angered by this surveillance, looked stolid, and as there were several gentlemen behind him, the Empress ran her eye over them, only to be greeted by the inevitable forward bend and smile

of courtiers who anticipate the felicity of being spoken to. She turned back to Ludovica. "*Mme. la Duchesse*," she said, "pray, find my *façon de sels* in my rooms and bring it to me."

As Ludovica curtsied and withdrew, Deodato, who was staring sullenly at the carpet, again had that uneasy sentiment of being watched. He looked sideways from under his lowered eyelashes, and, as he had suspected, saw the brilliant eyes of Princess Waldoz fixed on him again. As their looks met, her thick, ugly lips made a grimace at him . . . not unfriendly . . . but as it might be from one schoolmate to another . . . underlining the *bêtise* of which he had been guilty.

Almost immediately afterwards, before Ludovica had time to return, the Emperor rose from his cards, and the Empress and her ladies, leaving their own game where it was, stood up with him. There was a rustle of dresses all down the room as the rest of the assembly followed suit. Eugénie's eyes as she moved away from the loto table caught Deodato, and with her flashing smile she again gave him her hand to kiss. "Do not worry, M. Caprano," she said. "His Majesty shall give you your commission in the *Dragons de la Garde*."

Deodato bent over her hand, murmuring his thanks with a rush of gratitude. He could not resist her graciousness, though still wondering what the reason for her evident pique against Ludovica could be.

Meanwhile the Emperor with his hesitating step and veiled eyes had offered his arm to his consort. Preceded again by the Prefect of the Palace walking backward before them, and followed again by the Adjutant-General in his glitter of gold facings, the scarlet Chamberlain, the green Equerry, the silver-and-blue Orderly Officers, the ladies of the Household in their swelling skirts and flower-wreathed head-dresses, they moved in procession down the flamboyant salon to where at the further end the ushers in their chains flung wide the folding-doors and pulled them to again upon the emptied shrine.

(2)

Deodato went to look for his father among the dispersing guests. He found him at last talking to a tall, lean gentleman in gold-striped red trousers, carrying a General's képi with its embroidery of gold

leaves under his arm. Orlando turned at his son's approach, and so did the military gentleman, displaying a gaunt face, with a hooked nose over sandy moustaches and imperial.

"Aha! my nephew at last!" exclaimed Orlando. "This young spark, General, has spent his first evening at the Tuileries standing behind the Empress's chair. He will go far! But permit me to give the young man the honour of a presentation to you, *M. le Duc*"; and using the Gallicised form of the name by which it had been agreed between them that Deodato should henceforth be known, Orlando presented "my nephew, François Napoléon Caprano" to "*M. le Duc de Smolensk*."

"The Duke of Smolensk!" Deodato could not check the exclamation or the start that accompanied it.

"What is it, François? You cannot, surely, have met the Duke before?" asked Orlando rather severely.

"Everyone has heard of *M. le Duc* and his exploits at Solferino," stammered Deodato.

Smolensk bowed grimly. "My nephew," Orlando explained, "is also destined for the army. He has dared to hope for a commission in her Majesty's Dragoons."

"A very spoiled corps," replied Smolensk.

"I know the Guard is expensive," sighed Orlando. "Still, if they will teach my nephew to be a good soldier——"

"That is not taught. That comes by nature. Was the young man born to sit a horse and handle a sabre? Has he a strong arm, a straight eye, a stout heart? That is all that matters. The rest is only lace and epaulettes . . . or books and boredom."

Count Caprano chuckled. "The very spirit of the *Grande Armée*!" he said. "How often did I hear it, marching to Waterloo . . . where we fought like lions, whatever they may say!"

The Duke bowed. "I must ask you to excuse me, *M. le Comte*."

"You are not waiting to take *Mme. la Duchesse* home, then?"

"No. She will return in the coupé when her Majesty has done with her services. I am waiting for General Rollin, the Adjutant-General, to get himself out of his shell of gold, and we are going to the club together. Do you care to join us for a game?"

"I thank you no. I am too old and François is too young for all-night sittings, *M. le Duc*."

"We will change all that for him in the Guard," said Smolensk, with a harsh, abrupt laugh. He saluted stiffly, and stalked away

towards the doors of the salon, his spurs clinking, his right hand pulling out his moustache to its familiar dagger-point.

"There," said Orlando, following him with his eyes, "there goes a true *sabreur* of the old school! One to emulate, if you can, in your new career, *mon neveu!*"

When they got down to the vestibule opening on the courtyard of the Carrousel a light rain was falling. Count Caprano's footman was waiting with their wraps, and helped Orlando to put his on. Deodato, solicitous for his new clothes, wound his evening-cloak tightly about his body and adjusted a white silk muffler over his cravat. While he was doing this, he felt his elbow lightly touched, and turning round saw another servant in a strange livery touching his hat to him.

"*M. Caprano jeune?*" asked the man, whose face was somehow familiar to Deodato.

"I am he," Deodato answered. "What do you want?"

The servant bowed and handed him a note, folded into a triangular shape. "I was to give Monsieur this," he said in a low tone, "and to say that I will be with the coupé on the Quay, at the corner of the Pont Royal, if Monsieur will be so good as to come with me."

Deodato looked at him in perplexity. Then he stepped under one of the lanterns of the porchway and opened the note. At the sight of the hand in which it was written he started and took a swift glance to see if his father was watching him. Orlando, however, who had sent his footman after his carriage, was disputing angrily with the dignified Suisse in the cocked hat who kept the palace doorway, charging him with delaying the approach of his brougham. Deodato bent his head quickly over the note and read:—

"How you come to be here I do not know and cannot guess. But you come as if sent from Heaven to me. Again I implore your aid. For the love of Jesus, if it is possible, get into my carriage and let Luigi take you to our house in the Boulevard de l'Etoile. There is no one else to whom I can appeal in my necessity, my friend of former days.—L. de S."

A dreamy sensation swept over Deodato as he read. In a flash he now recognised in the servant who had stopped him the same old fellow who, eighteen months ago (it seemed years) had handed him

a similar note in the Gardens of the Villa Pamfili. And he understood what the note meant. Piero, he knew, was in Paris; again he was being called upon to deliver Piero from his enemies. . . . Did life then never progress, but repeat itself eternally?

"François! François! what are you waiting for? Am I to catch my death of cold?" It was his father fretfully calling to him from the window of the brougham.

"The carriage of *M. le Comte* stops the way!" protested the Suisse gravely, striking his gilt mace upon the stones.

"Wait by the Pont Royal," said Deodato hurriedly to Ludovica's servant. Then dashing out into the rain to the door of his father's carriage, "Sir, I beg you to excuse me," he said. "I cannot return with you. I have received a message to . . . to go to the house of a friend . . . it is urgent. . . . I cannot refuse to comply, sir!"

For a moment Orlando stared at him as if he had gone mad. Then his face suddenly broke up into little wrinkles and twinkles, and his eyes gleamed, as if in admiration of his "nephew's" impudence, in the yellow light of the carriage-lamp.

"Already!" he croaked. "*Morbleu!* you go faster even than one had expected! You are truly your father's son . . . or so no doubt you deem yourself, my fine cockerel! Well, who am I to forbid you? Go to her!—whoever she may be! But, listen! You must find your own way back to Cythère. I will not have my horses catching cold waiting about for you till all hours of the morning. . . . And have a care not to wake me when you return! My sleep is precious. . . . I will give orders for one of the fellows to sit up for you. . . . All right, then! Drive on, Antoine!" for the Suisse had been beating his indignant tattoo more and more insistently.

As soon as the red spots at the back of his father's carriage-lamps had dwindled out of sight, passing the exit-arch of the Carrousel, Deodato, wrapping his cloak still more closely round him, passed out of the Palace on foot through the lion-gate, which was thrown open this evening, and saw the glimmer of the lights of Ludovica's coupé under the trees up on the Quay. Luigi, who held the reins on the box, bent down and smiled to him. "To-night I am coachman, too," he said. "Will the Signore be good enough to step inside? We are going to the house of the *Duchessa* over there"; he pointed with his whip towards the Arc de Triomphe.

(3)

They drove at a brisk trot down the Avenue of the Champs-Élysées till the music and lamp-lit gaiety of the *Bals* and *Café-concerts*, only half-damped by the rain, gave place beyond the Rond-Point to the dignified repose of the mansions and hotels of the new aristocracy lining the approach to the Place de l'Étoile. The great arch stood up black against the night-sky, and after passing the yet undemolished barrier of the Étoile, they found themselves on the very outskirts of Paris, where only a few magnificent houses, at the heads of the still rural avenues radiating from the arch, marked the beginning of a new wealthy quarter.

The mansion of the Smolenskys was one of the most lately built of these residences, with other unfinished ones neighbouring it, and its grounds at the back giving upon waste land cut up by builders' litter and a few clumps of surviving trees. The house itself was an elegant erection of grey stone, with a façade of Corinthian pilasters, carved masks, wrought-iron balconies, and round, wreathed windows in the lofty mansard roof. The semi-circular, pillared porch, raised on six steps, with its glass *marquise*, opened upon a courtyard fronted by a low wall, with a carriage entrance flanked by stone urns at either end.

Luigi drew up under the porch, where a gas-globe in an ornamental iron bracket flared brightly, showing up the thin arrows of the rain falling on either side of the glass shelter. "Draw your cloak well round you, Signore," advised Luigi, who, after fastening the reins, had climbed down from the box to open the door, "and keep your scarf over your mouth. It rains terribly and it is chilly! You may take a cold!"

Deodato obeyed, more from concern for his Court suit than from fear for his health. It certainly was raining hard at the moment, and he wondered why Luigi, with all his care for him, kept him standing out there on the top of the steps directly under the lamp, while he explained in his native Italian, with slow repetitions, that the *Duchessa* was not home yet . . . but that she would certainly come . . . the Signore need have no fear about that. . . . She would not be long. . . . In the meanwhile the Signore was asked to have the goodness to wait.

"Certainly, certainly!" Deodato agreed with a little shiver. "But can one not wait indoors, Luigi, out of this rain?"

The old man opened his mouth in a silent laugh like a cavern. Then, after a swift glance at the opposite side of the road, where a patch of rough ground sprinkled with bushes designated the future garden of a big mansion still in scaffoldings, he produced a latch-key and opened wide the polished walnut doors, admitting Deodato into a hall where gas-jets burned dimly.

"*Un momento! un momento!*" he muttered, and leaving both doors wide open though the wind and the rain drifted in, he turned up all the gas-lamps in the hall to their full strength, making a lighted picture within the frame of the doorway. Again he gave a glance into the blackness of the deserted road and the grounds of the half-built house opposite. Then he slowly closed the doors.

"Will the Signore be graciously pleased to wait in the cabinet here?" he said, going to the side of the frigid stone hall, with its marble staircase ascending to a landing that ran round all four sides of the house at the height of the first storey.

Deodato caught him impatiently by the sleeve. "Count Piero?" he demanded, "where is he?"

"*Zitto!*" Luigi set a finger to his lips. "He is in a safe place. He is better where he is until the *Duchessa* comes home. She will arrange everything."

He opened a door and led Deodato into a dark room smelling of leather, which, when he lit the gas-globes, revealed itself as sombrely masculine, with arm-chairs of red *maroquin*, a fluted panelling of dark wood running half-way up the walls and an embossed wall-paper of chocolate and old-gold above it. There was a brass-mounted First Empire desk with packets of papers neatly ranged upon it in the middle of the Persian carpet; over the mantelpiece a tall oil-portrait of Napoleon I crossing the Alps in a tempest, and on another wall a painting of the Battle of the Alma. Opposite this, between the windows, was a trophy in a glass case of a dented sabre and scabbard crossed, with a sabretache pierced by several bullet-holes hanging between them. An inscription on the case recorded that the sword had been carried by the Duke of Smolensk, and the sabretache had saved him from being wounded at Solferino.

Deodato realised uneasily that he was in Ludovica's husband's study—the sternness of the room was as characteristic of the man he had just met in the Salon d'Apollon as was the frigidity of the entrance hall, contrasting so contemptuously with the fashionable profusion of ornament. The only sign of relaxation in the study

was a bookcase filled with novels of Paul de Kock and Féval. Apart from some illustrated volumes on the campaigns of the First and the uniforms of the Second Empire, these were the only reading in the room. Deodato wondered what the Duke would think if he came home and found him in his study uninvited.

The face of Ludovica's husband was not a cheerful one to think of in this connection, and Deodato felt more and more uneasy and even a little resentful at being placed in this clandestine and compromising position without any warning. . . . Then he told himself that Ludovica would not have done this without necessity . . . that she could never purpose anything dishonourable . . . and that for her sake he was ready to face, if need were, even dishonour. It was only this uncertainty, he reflected, listening to the ticking of a bronze clock supported by Hungarian Hussars on wild horses over the fireplace, that was trying to the nerves. . . .

He waited so long that he was almost dropping off to sleep upon his feet, for he had an apprehension about sitting down upon one of the Duke's chairs, when he suddenly heard the click of the front-doors opening and a murmur of voices in the hall. The next moment Ludovica rustled into the room, still in her white dress with the wonderful pearls gleaming at her throat.

"So you are here?" she said, holding out both her hands in a gesture of impulsive friendship. "I knew you would come! Oh! how I need you! But," she smiled with self-reproach, "I am forgetting to congratulate you . . . I have just heard of your great good fortune! Who could have believed it when we met in Rome?"

"I have to ask you," said Deodato, in a low voice, "to forget that we ever met in Rome. You understand, there is a story agreed upon with my . . . uncle——"

"Have no fear! I should be the most ungrateful woman living if I did not respect any secret of yours, my friend! But you never hoped, did you, when you set out to seek your fortune in the world that it would lead you to this?"

"I always prayed, though I sometimes no longer dared to hope, that it would one day lead me back to you!" he answered in a voice that shook.

Ludovica stepped back a little, and Deodato saw a startled, almost fearful, look come into the great brown eyes . . . He saw that she had suddenly realised she was talking to a man and no longer to a boy.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "I wonder if I am doing right in asking of you what I must ask—now that you have so much to lose! I suppose it was hard-hearted of me then, but I let myself play with the fate of the *Fratricello* as I hardly dare with your future now!"

"I have no future that matters to me apart from serving you," protested Deodato. "Do you think I would not return gladly to the old coat and the hard highway if it were the price of serving you? Let us waste no more time, *mon amie* . . . I may call you that? . . . but tell me, where is your brother? He is in this house, is he not?"

She nodded, winding her fingers together in anguish. "It was a mad act, to come back to Paris!"

"So I thought. I have seen him, you know."

"Where?"

"At a club in the Quartier Latin . . . I cannot explain that now. But also in the Bois . . . running after the Empress's carriage . . . Do not look so frightened!" for she had gone ghastly white with a sob of *Dio Mio!* in her throat that made the pearls heave. "It is all over now. He attempted nothing . . . that time."

"Thank God! Oh! thank God! But the police are on his steps, close on them! . . . Ah! this police of the Empire how terrible it is! The *sbirri* of the Pope are a child's game compared to the agents of M. Hyrvoix! . . . I cannot understand how the Emperor . . . so gentle . . . with such a good heart at bottom . . . can surround himself with such tigers. You know," her voice sank, "they are Corsicans, who think nothing of using the stiletto to make an unwanted man disappear!"

"Not all of them, I think," said Deodato, smiling to re-assure her, for he could see that, despite the warmth of the stuffy room, she was trembling all over. "Courage, *mon amie*! We will outwit them as we did the police of the Holy Father!"

"But they are here—do you understand?" She came close to him and whispered. "The house is encircled already. Some are at the back outside the garden; others, Luigi says, watching from the bushes in front of the empty house opposite!"

"You think so?" Deodato was incredulous. "If they have traced Piero to this house why do they not make an entry and take him?"

She shook her head. "They would not dare do that. They fear my husband. If they put on him the affront of an invasion of his

home to seize a political suspect, he would never rest until he had taken satisfaction of the men responsible. And my husband has the ear of the Emperor to-day. So they are waiting to seize my poor Piero the moment he leaves the grounds of the house."

"But . . . but," stammered Deodato, "cannot *M. le Duc* then assist the Count? If he threw his cloak round the fugitive, who would dare to pluck him from under it?"

Ludovica shook her head sadly. "It is a vain hope," she murmured in an almost inaudible voice. "My husband would never involve himself for the sake of my brother . . . It would be his political ruin . . . Oh! do not desert me, *mon ami*, do not desert me! I have no claim at all on you, I know well, but if you draw back . . . if you deceive yourself with the dream that my husband will help . . . you doom Piero for certain . . . perhaps to death within the hour . . . and I . . . I do not know how I shall survive it!"

"If I were your husband," said Deodato savagely, "I would not allow politics . . . career . . . anything to come before you!"

She gave an evasive, sad smile, looking away from him. "I must be grateful for your words," she said, "but perhaps you do not know how hard it is to risk all one has built up by years of labour and struggle just for a woman . . . even if one loved her."

"He will not risk what he has gained! So be it! I will, at any rate, risk all I may ever hope to gain. Quick! Let us consult. Have you any idea how we may get Piero out of this house under the noses of *M. Hyrvoix's* terrible *mouchards*?"

"Luigi," she faltered, "had an idea. The old idea again. It is that you should change clothes with Piero as before and let him drive away at the front door in your Court suit. Luigi is sure they would not molest the gentleman in Court dress whom they saw arrive at the front door long after Piero took refuge in the house. He might be some powerful friend of the Duke's."

"So it was to display me to them in my cloak and muffler that Luigi kept me standing so long outside the door in the rain! The old rascal!" Deodato could not help laughing.

"Did he do that? Excuse him! It was all part of the scheme. Will you, then, lend Piero your clothes?"

"I will do more! I will dress myself in his and slink out, rather guiltily, by some door at the back of your garden just at the moment when Piero goes out to the carriage in front. If they do not all make

a rush after me and let him go . . . they are cleverer than any *sbirri* I ever encountered."

"You would dare to do that? But my friend, you will put yourself in their power!"

"Leave me to deal with them! . . . Yes, believe me, I know something of this game. I shall be safe."

She made a despairing gesture. "I must accept your offer . . . perhaps it will be your sacrifice . . . How shall I ever repay you?" She suddenly burst out crying. "Oh! but you do not know! . . . after these terrible months . . . to find a real friend again!"

Piero had been concealed in an attic of the great mansion, since, except for Luigi and Benedetta, both of whom she had brought from Italy with her, there was not a servant that Ludovica felt she dared trust, and she had taken pains to send the others to bed. It was Benedetta who, with a fearful smile, now led Deodato up the narrowing higher flights of stairs to the little room in a far wing, piled with unused furniture and trunks, where Piero was lurking with a shaded candle and the remains of a meal.

He was at first alarmed by Deodato's appearance, but broke into a hoarse chuckle when he recognised him. As the plan for his escape was unfolded to him, he snorted. "What, again?" he demanded. "First the *défroque* of a friar; and then the chrysalis of a courtier! I have to don some dirty vestures in this life of mine, curse me if I don't! . . . But you have become the gay humming-bird now, *Fratónzolo*, haven't you? I suppose you look for thanks . . . but I will thank my sister. Out of the room, Benedetta; we have our toilettes to make!" and as the servant softly withdrew, he turned to Deodato and said, "I suppose you know you are playing with fire this time, *Frataccio*? You have not an old fool of a father to deal with now, but a husband who is feared by every duellist in Paris. And though he may not care a scrap for Ludovica any more, he is not the man to let his property be stolen! Better not provoke him, *Frata*, or if I want your clothes a third time I may go bare."

While he chattered, he had, with the silent help of Deodato, who decided to disregard his taunts, been awkwardly getting into the Court breeches and vest. "Yes," he resumed, as he stood up, gingerly moving his shoulders under the tight-waisted tail-coat, "I wonder what our next exchange will be? It is becoming a fine farce!"

He minced up and down the garret, aping a courtier's walk and bow; then said roughly to Deodato. "On with my slops, Brother! If the Duke comes back and finds you——! Not that there is much fear. He will be with his little friend from the Bouffes till morning."

"Are you both ready, Signori?" whispered Luigi, putting his head in at the door. "Then descend! I will bring the carriage round from the stable in a couple of minutes . . . Those *sbirri* are closing round the house, back and front. *Bruti genti!* If they should decide to make an entry . . . no time to lose!"

Piero seized Deodato's shoulder with his single claw. "They are led by your former landlord, M. Dubonnet . . . I advise you beware of that fellow. He sticks to your heels like mud. It was you betrayed me to him . . . I will believe without intention. But you owe me this deliverance, at least. Come, Luigi, let us go!"

Down in the hall Ludovica awaited them, pale and agonised. She thought as the two men crept down the stairs behind Luigi that they were much of a height, with black hair both and curving noses. But Piero's fleshy, tormented lips had nothing in common with Deodato's beautiful mouth . . . Still the scarf would hide that . . . The ribbon binding her hair had become loose, and the heavy golden coils had fallen in disorder on her shoulders as she took Piero in her arms and kissed him tenderly. "If you reach your refuge on the Left Bank safely, try to send me a message," she pleaded. "We must get you out of France again——"

"I have enough friends in Paris to be able to do that," he answered. "I would like to find out first why they have set on me again . . . what evidence they have that I am Santacroce who was drowned."

"No, no, Piero! Go! go! At once! And do not return, unless by some means we can get an amnesty for you!"

Luigi interrupted. "I go to fetch the carriage," he said. "Now," he lifted his finger, "as soon as you hear the wheels in the court let *that* Signor," he pointed to Deodato, "go out by the garden gate. They will gather and pursue him. . . ."

"I will give them a good chase," said Deodato.

"Then let the *Signor Conte* walk calmly down the steps in front and enter the carriage. It is all understood?"

"It is understood, Luigi," said Ludovica. "Good-bye, little brother,"

She folded Piero a last time in her arms and then beckoned Deodato to follow her into the large drawing-room that ran the length of the

house at the back of the hall. Only a faint glimmer came into it through the door, which she left open, and quite simply she took Deodato's hand in her long, firm fingers to guide him among the chairs, sofas, poufs, occasional tables, china cabinets, ornamental screens and jardinières with which inevitably the chief salon of the mansion was crowded.

Through these obstacles Ludovica led him into the conservatory of tinted glass, which projected from the centre of the salon into the garden. The rain had ceased about half-an-hour ago, and through the panes a fitful moon with clouds floating past it irradiated and shadowed the conservatory by turns. Ludovica unlocked the glass door into the garden.

"At the foot of the lawn there," she whispered, "to the left of the summer-house, you will find the door in the garden-wall. It only needs to push the bolt. Go, then, my friend, and may God have you in his keeping. Know, too, that I will always bear you in my heart for this!"

He was thrilling from the touch of her hand, and as she tried to withdraw it held it fast. "Promise," he said, with his heart beating wildly, "promise that I shall meet you again! Now that I have found you, I cannot lose you a second time!"

She withdrew her hand with a gentle insistence "Yes . . . yes . . ." she said, "of course you must come to see us . . . to meet my husband . . . but now go . . . go . . . or all may be spoiled! Adieu, true friend!"

He kissed her hand passionately before he dropped it; then opened the conservatory door and crossed the lawn. In the silence of the night, for it was long past twelve, he could hear the hoofs of the horse on the stones of the courtyard as the carriage was driven up to the front door. Hastily he pulled back the bolt and issued from the garden.

The rainy moon glimmered on a rough stretch of ground, with builders' sheds, excavated holes, piles of debris, trodden bushes, and at a little distance some clumps of trees on the still virgin terrain stretching away towards the fortified outer girdle of Paris. For the moment he saw nobody, and began to walk cautiously forwards. He had gone about fifty yards from the grounds of the house when he heard whistles and calls from point to point, and bending double, with Piero's hat pulled over his eyes, in mimicry of a fugitive, raced as hard as he could towards a clump of trees some two hundred yards

distant. As he ran he had the relief of hearing a faint clop of horse-hoofs again in the distance, and knew that Piero had escaped and that he had drawn the hunters on to his own track.

He kept straight on his course, however, glancing once over his shoulder and seeing heads bob up out of a dip he had just traversed in pursuit of him. Reaching the little copse, he crashed into the midst of it, tearing the clothes he wore, and waited for the pack to come up. Presently he heard their feet and their voices.

"He is in there, the animal!" panted one. "Surround the clump! He may break out at any corner!"

"*Voici le Patron!*" said another voice, "and the Inspector with him." Then, "We have *le Manchot*, *M. l'Inspecteur!* He is in the clump here!"

"Did I say he would try to escape across the fields?" said a self-satisfied official tone. "We did well to stretch the cordon on this side!"

"In the meantime, *M. l'Inspecteur*," said a high-pitched voice that Deodato recognised with a cold little thrill as that of his late landlord, "our man is in the trees . . . One of you go in and drive him out! The rest make a circle, and don't let him slip past or," he giggled, "you'll have me to reckon with."

There was a submissive, almost awed, murmur; then a step came trampling into the undergrowth of the copse, and Deodato walked coolly out on the opposite side into the arms of M. Dubonnet and two fellows in black slouched hats, who seized him and pinioned his arms under Piero Santacroce's caped coat. In a moment, as he had expected, there was an oath of consternation.

"It is not *le Manchot*, *Patron!*" cried the man who had been holding his left arm and now encountered a live hand.

"What do you mean, brute?" shrilled Dubonnet.

"I say, it is not our man. This fellow has two hands!"

"*Tonnerre de Dieu!* Who is this, then? Give a light, somebody!"

A match scraped, and in the flicker Deodato's smiling face was revealed. "*Sacré nom d'un chien!*" ejaculated Dubonnet, thoroughly upset, "but it is my last lodger!"

"M. François Napoléon Caprano, at your service, M. Dubonnet," said Deodato with meaning.

"What the devil do you mean by this?" Dubonnet, spluttering with fury, seized him by the collar.

"Come now! hands off, please!" cried Deodato. "By what authority do you stop me in this way, M. Dubonnet?"

"No nonsense with us, my lad!" said the Inspector, who seemed, however, in effect to take second place to Dubonnet. "Know that we are the police!"

"And what has the police to do with me, *M. l'Inspecteur*?"

"I arrest you on suspicion . . . on suspicion . . ." he faltered, "but if it is not the man, M. Dubonnet? . . ." He rallied, "Anyhow, I take you as an accomplice!"

"A moment, *M. l'Inspecteur*," said Dubonnet, who had recovered his calmness. "Let me have a word with you. Hold him fast you others!" They walked apart for a minute or two, and then came towards Deodato again.

"You are the nephew of M. le Comte Caprano?" asked the Inspector in a changed voice, lifting his tall hat.

"That is so, *M. l'Inspecteur*."

"And you say you are unacquainted with Count Piero Santacrocce, called *le Manchot*?"

"I met a one-handed man at a club to which M. Dubonnet took me; I have not the least idea of his name."

M. Dubonnet drew a hissing breath at his evasion of the trap.

"But how comes it then," pursued the Inspector, "that you are hiding in these trees at this time of the night, M. Caprano?"

Deodato threw out his hands with an elegant shrug. "Oh! *M. l'Inspecteur*, I beg you . . . as a man of gallantry! . . . In any case is it a crime to walk by night within the *enceinte* of the fortifications?"

"Why then," interrupted one of the agents abruptly, "is this one wearing the *pardessus* of Santacrocce . . . I should know that overcoat anywhere."

Dubonnet turned on him. "You know every overcoat in Paris by sight, my friend?" he asked witheringly. "As if M. Caprano might not have one of similar pattern!"

"But, *Patron*!" interrupted the agent in an injured tone.

"Hold your tongue!" said Dubonnet, and there was a bewildered silence.

Suddenly another of the agents slapped his thigh. "I have it!" he exclaimed. "The other! He was the one who drove away in the carriage . . . in Court dress! *Fichtre*, we have been well fooled!" There was an angry stir among the men.

"*M. l'Inspecteur*," said Dubonnet calmly. "We have missed our chance to-night; we will investigate later through whose negligence. I advise that the men be sent home now—it is almost morning. We will report, if you please, to M. Hyrvoix at eleven. I may have something more to tell by then."

As the Inspector muttered some instructions before moving away in the direction of the Étoile, followed by his group of disappointed men, Dubonnet turned to Deodato and asked politely, "May I have the honour, Monsieur, of escorting you part of the way to your new home? There are dangerous prowlers round the *enceinte*."

"I believe you, M. Dubonnet, and I accept your offer with pleasure. But it is only fair to tell you in advance that I do not propose to discuss my private affairs with you."

"I should not dream of intruding so far, M. Caprano," said Dubonnet with a giggle. "This way, if you please then. It will bring us by a short cut to the Porte Maillot."

They walked away together; and as soon as they were alone, with the first pallor of the dawn throwing a colourless light on the skeletons of marked-out roads, the groups of half-built houses, and the little old country villas with their gardens, now embedded in the mire of development, Dubonnet changed his tone. "Come now," he said with a knife-edge to his voice, "no need for fencing between us two, I suppose? Why did you enable that terrorist to escape? He is the missing third of the bomb-throwers outside the Opera . . . I am sure of it."

"Meaning you are *not* sure of it, M. Dubonnet."

"Come now, M. Caprano, a truce to your wit! Let me remind you that you have something else to explain beside your complicity with this Santacrocé——"

"Which I deny."

"Which you will confess. Otherwise I shall push to the utmost my curiosity to know what you were doing in the house of M. le Duc de Smolensk, alone with the Duchess, between the hours of one and two in the morning."

"Who is the Duc de Smolensk? Where is his house? I am a stranger to Paris, M. Dubonnet."

"*Sacré bleu!* Will you still try to face me out? You were caught coming out of his house were you not?"

"Quite the contrary. It was while I was walking blamelessly in the region of the Boulevard de l'Étoile that I was challenged,

hunted and detained—quite illegally. There is no law, I think, against walking in a public part of Paris by night ? ”

“ Why are you wearing Santacroce’s *pardessus*, then ? ”

“ Do *you*, then, M. Dubonnet, know every overcoat in Paris ? You are really marvellous ! ”

“ You were seen to drive up to the Duke’s house in one of his carriages ! ”

“ Come, come, M. Dubonnet. The man who drove up . . . and drove away again . . . was in Court dress, your own fellows said so. Better find him . . . or tell *M. le Duc* you wish to know the name of his friend, whoever it may have been, to arrest him ? ”

“ M. Caprano, you are a very clever young man ; but it will be better for you to come to terms with me. I have not yet the complete case against this Santacroce, I admit. You shall help me to perfect it. For your choice is this. To confess to me that you were with the Count in that house, or to answer to the Duke of Smolensk for being alone with his wife at that hour.”

“ M. Dubonnet, there is one thing that worries me.”

“ What is it ? You may be frank. I am still your friend . . . if you will be reasonable.”

“ I am worrying over what will be said to M. Dubonnet of the Secret Police by his Imperial Majesty when I complain that I, a gentleman specially chosen by him and by the Empress to hold a commission in the Imperial Guard, am being besmirched with these base and scandalous suspicions.”

“ Indeed ? Indeed ? ” M. Dubonnet’s voice rose to a squeak, and Deodato detected a tremor in it. “ I too am wondering ! It is not what will be *said* but what will be *done* by the Duke of Smolensk to the young man who visited his wife clandestinely last night.”

“ That also remains for you to prove, let me remind you, M. Dubonnet . . . Yonder is the Porte Maillot, is it not ? I shall need your escort no further ; I can find my own way now to Cythère. Good-day, M. Dubonnet. How is your charming wife, by the way ? ”

M. Dubonnet could not restrain his giggle. “ *Vous êtes un fort, vraiment !* But beware, M. Caprano ! I have pulled down bolder fellows than you . . . in the end. If you should think better of your refusal, come and see me. You know my address.”

“ Adieu, M. Dubonnet. It is a pleasure to have renewed acquaintance with you.”

The summer dawn was bright by the time Deodato re-entered

Cythère, and said to the washed-out valet de chambre, who had patiently waited up for him: "Emile, *mon brave!* Do you see these astonishing rags in which I am clothed?"

"*Dame, Monsieur,*" Emile smiled in spite of his fatigue, "they are not particularly *comme il faut.*"

"Could you cause them to disappear . . . totally . . . with five napoleons?"

"Monsieur is too good." The fellow grinned, almost winked.

"You are right, Emile. These husbands are devils of fellows sometimes to get away from!" and he winked in return unmistakably.

"*Monsieur est très fort.* That is easily seen." Emile's enjoyment was immense. "The little secrets of Monsieur are quite safe with me."

CHAPTER FIVE

HUNTING

(I)

THE sunshine of an early May morning lit up the Fountain Court of the Palace of Fontainebleau. Upon the lake that sparkled below the terrace one or two pleasure-boats moved round the islet and its arcaded summer-house ; on the golden stretches of the lawns, that contrasted with the dark-green velvet of the strips beneath the trees, parasols moved, and male escorts in the formal informality of black cut-away coats and white trousers strolled beside the Emperor's lady guests.

Down the steps from one of the doorways in the buildings of the court came two figures, an old, white-haired gentleman with a slow, hopping step like some tired bird, and a young man with a square, military shape to his shoulders, dressed in the tall hat and strapped trousers of civilian riding-clothes, who offered the other his arm to help him descend.

"Believe me, *mon neveu*," said the aged gentleman, coughing slightly, and contorting a face that was now a web of sunken wrinkles, "in the days of the Emperor's uncle every officer here, you among the rest, would be wearing his uniform all the time. Now you are like *petits crevés* perpetually in bourgeois clothes. What the devil, are you ashamed of the uniform then? It took you long enough, François, to become an officer of the Guard. I should have thought you would have been proud enough now to show it!"

Deodato nodded, with a smile of retrospect. It was true enough that it had taken him an unexpected time to gain the coveted place in the Dragoons of the Guard, for this was the spring of 1865, and he had only been attached to the regiment about four months. He suspected the Emperor's gentle obstinacy of setting him back as a rebuke to the Empress's claim in his case to choose her own officers for her own regiment. Anyhow, when he had completed his training, first at Saint-Cyr and then at the Imperial Cavalry School at Saumur,

he had been dashed by the intimation that there were no vacancies in the *Dragons de l'Impératrice*, and that he must be for the present gazetted to a Chasseur regiment in garrison in Algeria. Strange new setback in his career, but not without its lessons and its moulding power upon his thoughts and disposition. Not till the autumn before had the ceaseless wire-pulling of *mon oncle* at last had its effect, and the order come for his return to Paris, preparatory to being transferred to the Guard. And now he was a Dragoon of the Empress with Captain's rank . . . and hardly believing it after so many disappointments.

"Certainly, sir," he answered Orlando, "I am as proud as any man of my uniform ; but you will agree that a horsehair helmet, a plastron and a clanking sabre would be devilishly inconvenient wear at Fontainebleau. Sabretaches, too, would be apt to tangle themselves in flounces . . . and beyond that, believe me, sir, these ladies prefer the male bird not to display too much plumage !"

"You think too much about women . . . all of you," growled Orlando, "and theatres . . . and play . . . and champagne !"

Deodato laughed again in his carefree, disarming fashion. "I believe, sir, I can defend myself on some at least of these counts. There were not many theatres in Algeria. Gaming bores me, and I never touch a card, except to oblige. As for champagne, to be honest, I hardly know whether I am drinking it or hock. My wine bill is not a thousand francs a year."

"And that is not good either," fretted Orlando. "A young officer cannot have a better reputation than that of possessing a select, if small cellar. What *do* you spend your allowance on then ? Women, I suppose ?"

Deodato shook his head with a dreamy smile. "I shall never ruin you, sir, with expensive *cocottes*."

"There are those who may come more expensive even than *cocottes* in the long run !" retorted Orlando between his teeth, without looking at his son.

Deodato shot a quick, frowning side-glance at him, with inquiry in it. But Orlando did not pursue the veiled attack. Instead, he laid his hand almost affectionately on Deodato's arm as he limped on his stick beside him along the terrace. "Tell me, my boy," he said, "are you a soldier at heart ? Do you love the *métier*, or do you just accept it, like half the young men of birth who enter the army to-day ?"

Deodato stood still, and leant with his arms over the balustrade gazing out on the lake before replying. For a moment or two he let his thoughts run back over his military career up to date. At St. Cyr, he thought, he had digested mathematics and fortification with as much difficulty as in the convent he had struggled to digest theology and ascetics; he had conformed to the ritual of the drill-ground as patiently as he had conformed to the ritual of the altar. . . . His thoughts had truly been elsewhere.

At Saumur it had been rather different. He had taken to equitation as he had never been able to take to saluting, wheeling, standing to attention, and learning to point a sabre so as to drive it home in an enemy's body, and then twist it to render the wound fatal—a senseless proceeding, that! But horsemanship had come quickly to him! It meant sharing the movement and life of those muscular, flashing creatures which had always enchanted him and set his fingers tingling with the desire to express them in sculpture.

“Do you want to fight?” interrupted his father, with a pathetic longing in his voice. “do you dream, battles, decorations, glory?”

“I should try to do my duty, sir, when called upon.”

“Bah! a conscript could say as much! I do not believe you love war!”

Deodato did not believe it either. In Algeria he had experienced, hardly war, but desert skirmishing, with fatigue, thirst, suspense and a dash of danger. He had done his part; but for him Africa meant white walls, tawny desert horizons, the coloured surging of the bazaars, rhythmical, mesmerising music, lean brown bodies so sculptural that it was a crime not to translate them into bronze. There had been scanty opportunity for modelling while in garrison, and certainly no possibility of bringing home heads or figures intact. Deodato had been able to bring back only two fat sketch-books filled with cities, mosques, lance-bearing warriors, veiled women and curvetting Arab horses. . . . These and an immense strengthening of that habit of resigned contemplation which had carried him through his wanderings with Pulcinella through the English lanes. . . . He had needed some philosophy to carry him through two-and-a-half more years of separation from the sight of Ludovica.

“*Enfin!*” Orlando asked him, “what is it you really want?” and pat, without his stopping to think, the answer came from him, “To be a sculptor, sir!”

“But it is an insane idea, I tell you!”

"Well, sir, M. Delacroix was once pleased to speak flatteringly of a sketch of mine, and—what matters more to me—M. Carpeaux, who saw a *maquette* I made since I came home of a snake-charmer's head, with her reptiles coiling round it, said I might, if I had time, join one of his classes."

"Carpeaux!" fumed the Count, "Carpeaux is a fool! My son . . . my nephew . . . in clay-stained overalls in his *atelier*! No, my boy. You may keep sculpture as your hobby. . . . I have allowed you, have I not, to rent that little studio that you wanted upon Mont Sainte-Geneviève? . . . and be content with the little triumphs you have had since you returned. You made a rapid medallion of the Empress, which pleased her, and was a wise thing to do; and you also modelled the adorable foot of Princess Waldoz . . . which was slightly *risqué*!"

Deodato laughed. "She would not let me rest, sir, after the Emperor had complimented her on her ankle when she posed as *Diane chasseresse* in a tableau at Compiègne last November."

"And have you modelled the Duchess of Smolensk?" asked Orlando point-blank, with a sour look.

"No, sir, not yet," replied Deodato tranquilly, but with his lower lip jutting.

"*Mon neveu*, your hobby is one that may get you into trouble one day. You would be wise, really, to give it up."

"Ah! sir, do not ask that of me! I truly believe I should run away . . . desert the regiment. . . . I don't know what . . . take to the road again, perhaps, if I had to do that!"

"Ah! *vaurien*!" growled his father. "Where do you get that taste for vagabondage from? Not from me, most certainly . . . nor from your mother."

"Why, sir, was not I a thought of hers that had escaped?" asked Deodato with a sigh.

"Now I do not understand you at all. I shall go in. The heat grows too strong. I presume you are going to the meet?"

"Yes, sir—though I confess I find little pleasure in chasing a handsome creature like the stag to pull it to bits for one's pleasure. When the *meute* is up I mean to lose myself as quickly as possible in these lovely woods."

"And that is not the way to earn your right of wearing the Imperial Hunt Button."

Deodato gave a twirl to his trim black imperial. There was

a glint of satyr-like mockery in his eyes. "Between ourselves, don't you think the Imperial Hunt livery very unbecoming? Three-cornered hats with pointed beards?—come, sir!"

"Call me *mon oncle*!" snapped his father, and withdrew limping on his stick across the pale-yellow courtyard.

(2)

Deodato glanced at his watch, and found that there was still an hour before he need think of leaving for the meet. He descended the steps from the court and turned aside into the garden. Strolling through the alternate light and shade of the scrupulously barbered lawns, his thoughts ran on a matter that worried him more than *mon oncle's* dissatisfaction with his military ardour or suspicion of his artistic desires. It was the hit, twice repeated, at his "nephew's" relations with the Duchess of Smolensk, and Deodato asked himself with some uneasiness whether he had invited such thrusts by any imprudence.

In a society that seethed with scandal like the Court of the Tuileries it was only too easy to expose a chink in one's armour to the shafts of malice; and, on the other hand, it would have been a miracle of self-control if he had taken no advantage of the opportunities that had come his way since his return from his African garrison last November. . . . He had been starved so long! Before he had left Paris to go as a cadet to Saint-Cyr in the early autumn of 1859, he had been invited once to dine with the Smolensk, when Ludovica had made the opportunity to take him aside and tell him that her brother had written to her from the safety of England. (And as he had anticipated he had heard no more of the egregious M. Dubonnet's threats). He had called once or twice at the house in the Boulevard de l'Étoile when on leave from the School; but in the following spring the Duke had been promoted General of Division, with his headquarters at Metz, and the Duchess had accompanied him there, to live in a country villa which he possessed with some estates outside that city. And, before the Smolensk were recalled to Paris, for the Duke to become First Aide-de-Camp to the Emperor, Deodato was far away in his African exile.

Was it to be expected then that he should not have sought to feed his fill on her presence after this prolonged hunger, to find the realisation of so many hours of reverie under desert stars, when at

last he found himself back in France and restored to the society in which she moved? The Empress had not forgotten her ingenuous champion; as if to make up to him for the long, unjust refusal of his commission in the Guard, she had invited him to Court and had even seen that his name was inscribed on the list of her autumn parties at the Château of Compiègne. The young officer was now of the circle in which Ludovica was compelled to move. At dances, at dinner-parties he could not help meeting her; once or twice he had the felicity of riding close to her stirrup-iron when she was on horse-back with her husband in the Bois.

It was, indeed, during one of these rides, on an early morning when he had carefully planned an "accidental" encounter, that he had realised the truth of what he had suspected from his first meeting with her in Paris, namely, that her marriage (still childless) was one of misery. As he drew rein to greet the pair in an alley of the Bois, he had divined from Ludovica's pallor and violet-lidded eyes and from the Duke's steely, suppressed fury that a quarrel had just taken place. He would not have ventured to join himself to them if both had not shown by small, unmistakable signs that they welcomed the diversion of his company. And during his stay at Compiègne in the Imperial party her profound melancholy had been plainer still. To see her sitting *distracte* amid the hubbub of the nightly banquet under the crystal chandeliers and amid the silver-gilt plate, idly crumbling bread in her strong fingers, or to mark how listlessly she lagged behind the other ladies following the Empress on her walks through the woods, was to have his heart wrung.

With a little more sophistication he might have tried to probe her secret by sounding the gossip circles of the Court, presided over by the Carpatho-Croatian Ambassadress; but, hardened as he had been in a rough world, he shrank from such an idea in Ludovica's case as a sacrilege. Something came to his ears, through officer circles, of the Duke's manifold infidelities, and that was all. In the first few weeks of his return to Paris he fancied that he could count the times he had seen Ludovica smile . . . Then it was borne in upon him that most of those times it was his appearance that elicited the smile. . . . Then came a day that showed to both of them on what brink they stood.

February had brought a spell of frost; the lakes in the Bois de Boulogne were turned to ice; and all Paris society, from the Court

downwards, hastened to show its proficiency or amateurishness on skates. It was skill, no premeditated design, that brought Ludovica and Deodato together hand in hand on an afternoon when a red sun glinted through the leafless trees upon the island and a silvery haze veiled the far curves of the lake in mystery. Deodato had learned to skate upon the *Pièce d'Eau des Suisses* at Versailles when he was at Saint-Cyr, and to Ludovica the gliding motion came, like all physical exercises, with effortless mastery. No wonder then that they should forsake blundering partners, and set out together with crossed arms, his hand feeling hers beneath her seal-skin muff, to skim like swallows along the shore of the island, farther and farther from the cries and laughter of the crowd at the lake-foot.

Neither felt the need to speak ; their rhythmic harmony was more eloquent. Deodato could scarcely take his eyes off Ludovica's face, flushed by the whip of the cold air, the brown eyes shining, the scarlet lips parted in an almost ecstatic smile. As she quickened and quickened their pace, sweeping round the bulbous kiosk at the far point of the island, he knew what she was feeling. It was escape ; she was flying in imagination from the sorrows of her daily existence, fleeing through a self-created dream over a misted mirror of enchantment. But from him he was determined she should not escape—she should take him with her in her dream, he vowed ; and rapidly he swung beside her, keeping a time which gave her no ground to falter or complain.

At length, opposite the chalet, wrapped in its dreary winter sleep, she slowed down for breath, and with a cry of happiness sought to disengage herself. Daringly, however, he held fast to the hand under the muff. It was the second time he had clung to such a clasp, and this time he would not surrender to her gentle effort at withdrawal. He sought instead to draw her to him on her skates, his luminous eyes gazing into hers with a message that was unmistakable. Again he saw that frightened look come into her eyes ; but this time the colour that exercise had smitten into her cheeks deepened to a rose flush that overspread her whole face and even the marble of her throat between the coils of her fur. " No, no, my friend ! " she pleaded in a low voice, " for pity's sake ! "

The awe with which she always stood invested in his eyes made him hesitate, and in that moment of his hesitation she swiftly freed herself and darted away from him, floating like a vision in her swaying skirts through the gathering shades of the February afternoon

back towards the indistinct throng at the foot of the lake. He had followed slowly, his veins in a turmoil, wondering what she meant, but not daring to draw nearer to her. . . .

"Good morning, M. Caprano!" said a voice that brought him back from the wintry Bois to the warmth of the May morning. He looked up and saw the Carpatho-Croatian Ambassadors coming towards him over the lawn in her green hunting-habit, the three-cornered hat tilted audaciously upon her pile of dark curls, her long skirt gathered up in a hand that looked tinier than ever protruding from the square red cuff of the eighteenth-century riding-coat.

Deodato raised his hat and fell into the idle language of compliment. "To think, Madame," he declared, "that, not half an hour since, I was telling my uncle that the Imperial Hunt livery was unbecoming! I had not then seen the face of Princess Waldoz under the *tricorne*!"

"You admire my face so much," answered the Princess coolly, "that you have never even asked to model it. Not that I care"; she flicked her skirt with her whip. "Your style is too baroque for my taste."

"You find it baroque?" Deodato pondered, with the bulging, reflective furrow coming into the middle of his forehead.

"Unquestionably! It is a pastiche of Bernini. Hair flying, mouths gaping, every one of your subjects looking as if he or she had just sat down upon a needle! You made even our middle-class Empress appear to be an Amazon or a Bradamante!"

"But that, Princess, is how I read her soul!"

"Soul? Soul?" Clementine irritably thrust forward her ugly lip. "I would not care to have my soul read for me by an amateur in clay! . . . Could you sculpture an intelligence?" she asked him, with the sudden vehemence of a pistol-shot. "No need to answer! You know you could not, and it would not interest you if you could! What do you care for but *panache*? The surface of everything—display, agitation, emotion as shallow and transient as a hail-storm! . . . One sees the fashionable cavalryman in every line of your carving!"

"I protest!" Deodato took it good-humouredly. "I am as little of the typical cavalry officer as you are of the typical Ambassadors!"

"Well, I relent! You are just a little different from the ordinary *Dragon de l'Impératrice*, and I am just a little different from the ordinary diplomat's wife—perhaps!"

"But not the less effective for that! I hear that you and your Austrian colleague—dare I say rival?—Princess Metternich have so got the ear of the Empress to-day that the cause of Italy goes down and down. France still maintains the Holy Father on his throne in Rome; and no one cares for anything now, I find, at Court, but what everyone calls the 'grand thought' of the reign, this new Catholic and Latin Empire which is being set up by French arms in Mexico, for the benefit of an Austrian Archduke. That is your *grande pensée* too?"

"Why not? I am here to serve my sovereign, the Ban of Croatia, and his suzerain, the Emperor of Austria. King Victor Emmanuel has now swallowed up the whole kingdom of Naples. Is it not enough?"

"But you are too cruel to my country, Princess! That poor Nigra! He stalks about as lean as a violoncello!"

Princess Waldoz stooped to examine a flower in a border. "And that poor Duchess of Smolensk, does she grow thin, too?" she inquired casually. "Ludovica, now, has a head that you should model—full of fantasies and perturbations, suitable for your baroque pastiches."

"She has already been rendered by the hand of Bernini himself, and that is enough," retorted Deodato dryly.

"By Bernini? How can that be?"

Regretting that he had disclosed his dream to her malice, Deodato gave a curt explanation.

"But how romantic! . . . And so you have loved this great *brouillonne* ever since your mysterious boyhood in Italy? . . . No, don't sparkle up like that and try to deny it! I can see through a window, and your secret is safe with me. Come now, I will tell you one of mine in return—something I would tell no other man in the world . . . because no other man I have ever met is a child like you." She paused, and stood for a moment in silence, gazing across the spangles of gold with which the sun was rippling the lake. "You are a fool!" she said abruptly, "but if there were another fool like you on earth I would give all my life, with all the gifts it is likely to bring me, to be loved by him for six months . . . in the stupid way he would love a woman!"

She had not looked at him as she spoke, but now she suddenly turned her great purple eyes upon him with, he thought, a sort of agony in them, and also with a defiance that made him think of the

tincture of gypsy blood with which she was credited. And he felt shaken by her sudden passion, as by an electric shock. His voice shook as he answered banteringly. "Princess Clementine Waldoz will not tell me that she need go begging after any kind of lover that tempts her fancy. Is not all Paris at her feet? *La Metternich* is quite dethroned to-day and Princess Waldoz is the queen of every fête."

"All Paris!" she repeated, with the guttural inflexion that at moments replaced her artificial soprano. "Yes, I am Paris, I am *tout Paris*! I am chiffons, robes, fashion; I am wit and scepticism, luxury and heartlessness. I am the proper queen of this cosmopolis . . . a German-Croatian . . . and I govern my subjects by fear, fear of my tongue and fear of my eyebrows." She outlined their diabolique slant with one finger. "If I raise *this*," she said, "the Empress retires to her apartments and takes off her new gown. If I titter . . . so . . . Rouher, the 'Vice-Emperor,' goes red and breaks down in his orations like a schoolboy. If I flash my wit upon them, women of fashion have to be prevented by their maids from hanging themselves in their own garters. And," she added viciously, "the impudent newspapers join in and report 'the latest *mot* of the P— W—' That is my kingdom—are you envious of it?"

"Is it pleasant to rule your subjects by—that?" He pointed to the riding-whip clenched in her little fist.

She shrugged her knife-like shoulders. "They retaliate upon my reputation—no doubt, you have heard?"

"Pardon me! I do not listen to the gossip of the Court."

"Evidently."

"Why, what do you mean?"

"It appears you have not even taken note of what is whispered about your *belle amie*, the Duchess of Smolensk."

"There is nothing to be said against *Mme. la Duchesse*!" cried Deodato furiously, not understanding, however, why his voice shook so.

Clementine spread her thick lips in a laugh. "You remind me of the peasant who vows he d-d-does not b-b-believe in the castle ghost!" she mimicked. "You are as white as a sheet, my friend!"

"I repeat, Princess, anything you may have heard against the Duchess is scandal . . . scandal and lies!"

"What is the use of looking so piteously at me? I can neither

make nor unmake facts. Anyhow, Ludovica belongs by right to *M. le Duc*. What title have you to be jealous if she also belongs to . . . someone else ? ”

Deodato groaned. “ It is odious what you insinuate. Indeed, Madame, I think you should be ashamed ! ”

“ Ashamed ? The perfect Parisienne ? *Allons donc, mon cher Capitaine*—— ! ”

“ I believe you are a woman without a heart ! ”

“ That may be. But not without eyes ! ” She seemed to gloat over the misery she was causing him.

“ Be silent, I tell you ! Be silent ! ”

“ *Platt-il* ? Do you perhaps mistake me, Captain, for a trooper in your regiment ? ”

Deodato, with his eyes blazing darkly, took a step towards her with his hands clenched.

“ You see,” she said with her lips writhed back and that guttural intonation, “ I can move you . . . and whenever I wish to. Do not be so Olympian another time . . . And think over what I have told you ; no smoke without fire, remember ! ” She spread her long skirt out in an ironic curtsey, and turned her back on him.

Deodato was left wiping his brow, his whole nature shaken by the quick onset of Italian jealousy. The atmosphere of the Tuileries had not left him unscathed. Who dare make bold in that world to deny anything with confidence ?

(4)

He felt a little calmer, however, when, about an hour later, sitting the fine horse lent him from the Imperial stables, he watched the hunt move off from the meeting-place at the Croix de Toulouse through the waving greenery of the Forest.

Distinction had been lent to this last meet of the season by the news that the Emperor would not merely attend the gathering as usual with the Empress in a *char-à-banc*, but would follow the chase on horseback ; and amid the masquerade of men and women uniting the moustaches, imperials and piled coiffures of the mid-nineteenth century to the hunting-costume of the Court of Louis XV, his figure was conspicuous with the white plume upon its hat. He was closely attended by General Ney, the Prince of Moskowa, the *Grand Veneur*,

and the two *Lieutenants de Vénerie*; and, while the mounted Gendarmes in their bearskins of ceremony held back the throng of riders and onlookers, he passed slowly on with his inscrutable face, a little way behind the yapping and crying pack held in leash by the huntsmen with their great horns coiled round their bodies.

The red trimmings to the dark-green liveries flecked the spring woods as with drops of blood, as the cocked-hats of the *piqueurs* and valets, the *tricornes* of the followers, went bobbing along the glade into which they had turned from the flat high-road running through the Forest.

Deodato, still set on refraining from an active part in the chase, kept back his fretting horse while he watched familiar figures pass by. There was the Duke of Smolensk, his moustaches greying, but lean and rigid as ever, in close attendance on the Emperor; there was General Sertigues de Messimy, fussy and plebeian, thrusting into the Imperial entourage, his three-cornered hat absurdly tilted over his forehead. There were the other well-known Court faces, some clustered round the Empress's char-à-banc, others following the hunt; but a gap that made itself chillingly felt was the absence of Morny. Morny had been in his grave since March, dead before he saw the issue of this grave Mexican adventure in which he had been so closely interested, dead, leaving the Emperor (so said doleful Court whispering) deprived of his right hand—and with no means of replacing him.

There was a little burst of laughter as Princess Clementine Waldoz rode by, her purple eyes gleaming satirically, her whip held manishly against her hip, around her a minor Court of gentlemen among whom de Vaulancourt was prominent. Deodato drew still further away from the stream, so as not to encounter her.

He was glad in a moment thus to have withdrawn himself; for as the throng diminished, while the sound of the horns came faintly from the head of the cortège already out of sight, Ludovica suddenly appeared in company with two or three other ladies, but riding to one side and aloof from them. They were cantering to keep up with the rest, and she passed Deodato in a flash, not noticing him with her short-sighted eyes, which were fixed on the path and its obstacles ahead.

He turned off alone among the trees, letting the distant notes of the horns die away, and as the leaves enveloped him his mind ran back over his problem. He was reproaching himself now for letting

the sting of Princess Waldoz's perfidy run so deeply under his skin. He ought to have held to his faith that Ludovica was above that world of flippant intrigue . . . And yet it was her world . . . and she certainly was estranged from her husband . . . and certainly she was clouded with some sort of mystery . . . he had been aware of it from her demeanour ever since he had renewed acquaintance with her in Paris. Always, in the foreground or the background of her mind was some trouble . . . the frank simplicity of the girl he had known in Rome had disappeared.

To escape the rack of these questionings Deodato tried to sink himself in contemplation of the dappled light and shade of the woodland, to listen to its rustlings and bird voices, as he slowly mounted the slope of the great Forest. It was vain, and presently coming to a level ride, he sought to banish his worry by action, letting his hunter gallop hard along the avenue and leap a fallen tree-trunk with gnarled boles that made a formidable obstruction in the way. Beyond this the ride went straight onwards, tempting to a continued gallop, until it ended abruptly where the curtains of the wood parted on the brink of a promontory overlooking a stretch of barren, rocky country below.

A broken guard-rail alone protected this dangerous spot, and it took something of Deodato's newly acquired cavalryman's strength to jerk his hot mount to a standstill at a safe distance from the edge. He judged that the place was a bit of a trap as he swung away and re-entered the Forest on a downward slope. After a while he heard the horns again, and a minute or so later out of a ride that crossed the one he was on Princess Waldoz suddenly burst with one or two followers, her cheeks burning, her cloudy black hair falling down under her hat, her whip in vigorous action.

He felt no temptation to add himself to her following ; but continued on his own way, plunging deeper and deeper again into the green labyrinth. He seemed to be descending into the most ancient part of the Forest, where the foliage hid the May sky and the great, serried trunks seemed to darken the day. The atmosphere grew eerie and he realised that he was lost. At last, round the curve of a winding ride, lined by dark trees, he saw coming towards him a solitary horseman, walking his mount, with his head sunk on his chest. Deodato reined in with the intention of asking the way. The lonely rider drew nearer, and when at last he raised his head Deodato had only just time to lift his hat and bow. It was Napoleon, without

equerry or groom escorting him, and as he went by he acknowledged Deodato's salute with his usual aloof courtesy, but with a manner that plainly indicated his wish to be left alone. Deodato wondered what thoughts were brooding behind the heavy brow and slightly squinting eyes here in the recesses of the ancient royal domain of France.

It was out of the question to follow the sovereign ; but in a few minutes Deodato's perplexity was relieved by sudden fierce blasts of the horns mingled with the savage clamour of the pack close at hand ; and following the noise he came out on the bank of a large pool, round which the whole hunt seemed gathered, while in the centre the stag, its mild, surprised eye lit by a mocking dazzle of sunbeams, struggled with the hounds, who were leaping up and tearing at its shaggy throat and antlers. The water all round was whipped into a whirl-pool tinged with long streaks of blood, and the clamour of hounds, the shouts of huntsmen and blaring of horns made an infernal symphony.

And suddenly Deodato saw a sight that sickened him. Clementine Waldoz appeared on the brink, jumped from her saddle, and holding her skirt in one hand, waded out into the water, brandishing a long, curved Croatian hunting-knife in the other. The men on the shore shouted warnings to her, but she kept on her murderous course . . . and Deodato in disgust pulled his horse's head round and plunged back into the wood by the way he had come.

Once again the barking and horn-blowing grew faint, as he immersed himself anew in the leafy labyrinth. He had come to a place where the undergrowth was thick and the trunks again grew close together when, without warning, a horse ridden by a woman crashed across his path, forcing his own mount back on its haunches to avoid a collision. In spite of the shock and the speed with which the apparition whirled by, Deodato recognised in the sunlight that streamed through on to the path the face of Ludovica, white and staring under her three-cornered hat. His immediate thought was that her horse had run away with her ; and almost before the thought was formed he had wheeled his mount in among the trees and spurred after her.

Ludovica seemed to be riding quite recklessly among the trunks and under the branches, and it was only by a miracle, he thought, following and bending low, that she was not swept from the saddle as she went. Luckily a short stretch through the trees brought them

to another open ride, and here her horse, of its own will, swerved violently to the right and followed the path. Ludovica kept her seat with instinctive balance; but Deodato could not comprehend why she seemed to have abandoned control of the reins, which she was holding slackly in both her hands . . . The next instant this query was driven out of his mind as the reappearance of the fallen tree-trunk ahead drove home to him that this was the very ride he had traversed earlier in the day, ending in the cliff with the broken rail.

Again he struck spurs into his mount, and began to shout wildly after her "Ludovica! Ludovica!" He saw her horse jump the fallen trunk, while she swayed perilously in the saddle, and in a moment was over it himself, shouting louder and louder, "Ludovica! Ludovica! Stop!" This time she seemed to have heard him; he saw a shudder run through her form; she took a grip of the reins, and as her silver-headed whip fell flashing on the soil, she brought her strength into play to check the frightened horse. By the time Deodato had come galloping to her side to help her, she no longer needed his help, but had her mount prancing almost at a standstill.

"What was wrong?" he gasped. "What were you doing? Had he bolted with you? . . . You know there is a fall over a cliff up yonder?"

Ludovica stared at him for a moment in a stupefied way. Then she broke into sobs, and in such a hoarse voice as he had never heard issue from her before ejaculated, "Why did you stop me then? Why must you interfere?"

"Ludovica!" he cried, aghast.

"Oh! hold my horse!" she sobbed incoherently, "I cannot sit him any more!" and sliding out of the saddle almost before he could catch hold of the trailing reins, she tottered towards a tree-trunk with her hands over her eyes, and sank down exhausted on the moss at its foot. Tearing off her hat, she let her golden coils stream down to catch the indifferent sunshine, and sat there weeping into her fingers as though there were no one to watch her.

Deodato, who had sprung from his saddle, stood for a moment, with the reins of both horses in his hands, appalled at her woe, and not knowing what to do. Then swiftly looping the reins over the nearest convenient branch, he ran to her and stooped down beside her.

"Ludovica!" he pleaded, "Ludovica!" keeping possession of her Christian name, which he had shouted while pursuing her, "What is the matter? What has happened? Tell me, I implore you! Oh! Ludovica, speak . . . Look at me! I cannot bear this . . . Ludovica!"

With tremulous daring he touched her on the shoulder, and she stared up at him, her brown eyes drowned in tears, still crouched on the moss beneath the tree, the slim sole of her boot just showing under the hem of her tumbled skirt. But her only utterance was to moan again and again, "Why did you stop me? Why did you stop me?"

He threw his arms apart in a gesture of desperation. "Ah! *bon Dieu*, what am I to make of such talk? Was I to let you rush upon your death then?"

"And if it had been best for me to die?" she demanded. "I did not intend it . . . There was no sin against God . . . it would have been an accident. . . His choice, not mine . . . and I should now have been free . . . *free!*" She gave vent to a sigh on that word which seemed to rend her bosom in two.

"Free from what?" he asked. "Tell me! Do you think I have not known for weeks that you are suffering some secret torture?"

"Have I concealed my wounds so poorly?" she whispered, plucking at the moss with her wet, gloved fingers.

"Did you think you could hide them from the eyes of love?" he asked her. "Love is not blind, as idiots carve him!"

She struggled to her feet, supporting herself against the tree-trunk with one hand, while she held out the other entreatingly, as if to silence him! "You must not say such things," she implored. "I must not listen to you!"

His eyes raged with dark-blue fires; his voice mounted. "Why must I not say them? When your husband fails you, may no one else offer the sympathy, the help, it may be, which you so sorely need . . . which you so deeply deserve?"

"You must not speak to me against my husband!" she repeated in the same strangled whisper, her face turning more ashy than before.

"But if he speaks against himself? Boasts . . . in look and action, if not in words . . . of his infidelities? Makes himself . . . and you, Ludovica . . . the gossip of the Court, and cares nothing for the disgrace?"

"Do not speak about it, all the same!"

"Not speak about it, when it is driving you to compass your self-destruction?"

"I can show the fortitude of other wives in my case," she answered in a firmer voice. "I am not alone in the humiliation," she added bitterly, "at the Court of the Tuileries."

"Then it is not your husband who is the cause of this agony?" he demanded in some bewilderment. A thought struck him. "Is it Piero again?"

She shook her head. "I have heard nothing of Piero for more than a year."

"Then tell me, tell me! Oh! Ludovica, it will drive me mad if you will not let me help you!"

"You cannot help me," she said in a deathly voice. "And you will ruin your life . . . all your bright hopes, Deodato! . . . Do not add that to my burdens! I have already used you too much."

He caught at her hands, striving to draw her to him in spite of her trembling resistance. "But since I love you," he pleaded, "and no one on earth but you . . . loved you from the first moment when, a little boy, I beheld Bernini's vision of you! Since my life has no other aim, no other purpose——"

"Ah! stop! stop! Be silent, my friend, I pray you! For when you use such words I know you mean them . . . You would not degrade them to a courtier's game, I know. See then what you are doing to yourself! For I cannot give you what you ask!"

"Because you cannot love me?"

His words seem to strike her into stone. Her gaze evaded his, and he saw that deep flush which had overspread her face and throat the day they were skating together in the Bois again gather and conquer all her countenance. Her head drooped, and from her lips came an almost inaudible entreaty. "*Deodato, je te supplie!*"

Light flashed upon his darkness. "Ludovica!" he declared triumphantly, "you are afraid! You cannot deny it!"

He sprang towards her to snatch her into his arms, but she faced him rigidly and unresponsively. Realising that he would only be clasping a statue to his heart, he paused, furious and frustrated.

"It is useless," she said shaking her head mournfully, "I am not free."

"But since you have admitted that your husband ill-uses you infamously!——"

"I am not free."

"Not free?" His eyes began to harden. "What does that mean?" Like vipers the insinuations of Princess Waldoz began to hiss and sting his brain. "It means there is someone else? You have a lover——"

"No! no!" The cry rang with agonising sincerity through the wood. "That at least you must not . . . you shall not . . . believe, Deodato! Do not look at me like that. Oh! How can I convince you . . . Ah! yes . . . I know . . . Surely, surely, by this way!" She struggled for a moment, while he looked on wondering, with the pin that secured the cambric neck-cloth folded with two ends across her throat. As soon as this was loosened, she drew up by the chain that was then displayed to view a tiny reliquary of fine gold with antique byzantine chasings on it. Detaching it from her neck, she held it out in the palm of her hand, saying solemnly in her deep tones, "*È la Santa Croce!* It is the relic of the Holy Cross, the heirloom of our family, granted to me by my father to wear for my protection when I set out for France." She raised her hand in the air, clasping the sacred splinter in its splendid receptacle. "And holding this I swear to you that I have belonged to no man except my husband, and," her voice was choked with sobs again, "I have loved . . . no other man . . . at all."

There was a pause while a gentle breeze rippled the spring leaves over her head, and a bird high in a tree trilled a fragment of joyous song. Deodato, with automatic reverence, had uncovered his head when the relic was produced, and now stood mute and abashed at the tremendous character of her oath. "You need not," he murmured, "have called the Cross to your attestation. I would have believed Ludovica the woman, on her word."

"Thank you, my friend," she said with a look of relief, as she replaced the reliquary, and folded her neck-cloth again.

For a moment he stared at the ground, completely baffled by the mystery of her; then looking up he said:—

"At least I will not let you go till you have made me one promise. You will not again attempt your life . . . or try to make accident serve that hideous purpose. Promise me!"

She looked at him, half fearfully, half tenderly. Then an internal conflict seemed to convulse her.

"But I cannot!" she cried. "There are things I cannot bear! For Italy I will give everything . . . my labour and my life . . . I am willing to be used, God is my witness again, and used up for

my country . . . But there are things God himself has no right to ask ! ”

“ More riddles ! ” he sighed heavily. “ But you shall promise me that. ” He fixed his eyes on her. “ For my sake, Ludovica ! ”

She made a gesture of surrender. “ I cannot refuse you that, ” she said. “ I owe you too much, Deodato. Yes, and I was wrong in my mad ride just now. You have made me feel it . . . I promise you, gratefully, not to despair again. ”

“ And to look on me still as your friend ? ” he pressed, taking advantage of her recovered calm.

“ If you are willing, I am very willing, ” she said fervently.

“ Good ! Never feel again you are alone ! . . . And we will talk further of these things, *mon amie* . . . Shall we remount now ? The hunt, I think, must long be over. ”

(5)

The ride back was a silent one, each shrinking from saying much to the other, for fear of opening up again the dangerous vista disclosed by his confession and her avoidance of confession. Deodato's thoughts ran all the time on the enigma of her conduct, and he was still tormenting his mind with it during the hour of tea with the Empress, as he watched in a distrait fashion the little Prince Imperial in velvet breeches and red silk stockings, tumbling his dark curls in boisterous play over his father's dog Nero, while General Frossard, a lank, intellectual, irritable-looking engineer officer, already designated, it was whispered, as the Prince's Governor, stood by with a rather sour speculation on his face.

At dinner amid the Renaissance splendours of the Gallery of Henri II he had eyes for little but Ludovica's figure in a magnificent wine-coloured gown, which, with her pointed gold ear-rings and Marie Stuart coiffure, gave her the look of a seventeenth century Princess returned to grace this most Italianate of French palaces, a fit companion for Primaticcio's stucco nymphs on the Royal Staircase or Nicolo dell' Abate's goddesses on the walls of the banqueting room.

Deodato, with this vision before him, paid very little ear to the eternal chatter about the Mexican adventure and its perpetually

deferred hopes, and about the military brilliance of the new French Commander-in-Chief across the ocean, Marshal Bazaine. He remembered the little man with the Chinese face he had met on his first evening at the Tuileries, and the story of the séance. Bazaine had made his way since then. Deodato, however, did not find it so easy to free his ears from the stridency of the Duke of Smolensk's voice, which seemed to tyrannise over all that part of the table where he was sitting. He glanced from time to time askance at the lean face with the arrogant yellow eyes just peeping under their shields. Smolensk had no doubts about the Mexican adventure. Indeed, he seemed to insist too much, bearing down criticisms that nobody at this august party had ventured to put forward. Sometimes his thin lips gave a twitch to his moustache that almost suggested a threat of violence against anyone who should dare to call in question his political, strategic or financial assertions . . . Especially the financial ones! Most displeasing of all to Deodato, the unwilling listener, was the crease of avarice that spread upwards round his mouth when he reckoned up the gains to the shrewd investor. The years, thought Deodato, were not improving the Duke. He seemed definitely more degraded than he had done that night in 1859 when Count Caprano's "nephew" had first beheld him . . . But how formidable still! What a sharp-edged tool of intrigue and adventure! Deodato turned his head away with a disgusted tremor of his shoulders.

Long and tedious also seemed the evening in the salon afterwards, where some dancing took place to the strains of a mechanical organ churned out by the hand of the perspiring Chamberlain. Ludovica did not dance, and he had no opportunity of drawing nearer to her before the Sovereigns broke up the party for the night. The Emperor, he thought, had sat with somewhat the air of a wearied Titan through these subdued frivolities.

After saying good night to his father, who had received the very inadequate account he was able to give of the hunt with a dissatisfied growl, Deodato, whose nerves were too tense to give him hope of sleep, took himself and a cigar into the gardens. A slightly malignant crook of moon gleamed above the nocturnal velvet of the trees as he paced along the shores of the lake, and then back again towards the guest-wing of the palace. He strolled about for some time, still at his perplexities, until he heard a clock inside the Palace strike one, and realised that it was now very late. Only one or two windows

were still illuminated in this part of the building, and instinctively, without premeditation, he let his steps carry him towards the one on the first floor in the angle overlooking the lake which he knew to belong to Ludovica's room, and which still showed a clear light through its blind.

Everything was still, as his feet in their light evening pumps brushed the grass, and he had a vague idea that this part of the garden was closed to visitors, at any rate after dark. He had certainly with the casualness of youth vaulted over a closed gate from the terrace to reach it. He was not troubled about that if it brought him closer under Ludovica's window.

And it seemed that his audacity was rewarded. For her unmistakable profile suddenly appeared upon the blind, growing from a grotesque, squat shadow that was the first shape thrown by a candle inside the room near the window. It was only for a few moments that she was thus revealed to Deodato's enthralled eyes, for quickly another squat shadow loomed beside her, and then the Duke of Smolensk's face, beard and moustaches sharply pointed as he stretched out an arm and touched her on the shoulder, before disappearing with her out of sight behind the candle.

What a husband! Deodato, recounting to himself the sins of Smolensk, passed along the wing of the Palace with black hatred of the Duke in his heart . . . He was not thinking of where he was going, and was presently brought up against the high wall separating the grounds at this point from the streets of the town. As he paused, trying to see an issue for himself, his ear was caught by a squeaking sound. It was the grinding of a key in a rusty lock, and, following the noise with his eyes, he detected a door, half-masked by ivy in the wall. So there was another truant abroad, he thought with a smile; and as the door began slowly and stiffly to open, he stepped behind a tree to find out who was prowling like himself at this hour.

He saw a gentleman in evening dress and hat, with a cape round his shoulders, stoop under the ivy as he came through the door; turn to force the door to again and lock it; and then stand up, tall and lean, in the light of the sickle moon, which shone at the moment clear of any cloud-wisps. He was plain to recognise, and Deodato would have betrayed himself by a cry if his voice had not choked in his throat. For *this* was the Duke of Smolensk . . . the subject of his resentful thoughts . . . this and not the shadow he had seen against

the blinds with Ludovica and had assumed to be her husband ! He stood shaking, with a cold sweat pearly his forehead, while the Duke walked towards the long façade of the Palace wing and disappeared under a tunnelled entry which Deodato had not observed. Tip-toeing along the grass Deodato followed him, and watched him emerge into the great front court with the Horseshoe Staircase. Even now Smolensk did not show any anxiety to return to the society of his wife. Instead of turning to the right towards the entry to their apartment, he went straight across the court, keeping, it appeared, some other assignation, and disappeared in the shadows on the farther side.

Deodato returned, with knees that shook, to the garden, trying to set his whirling thoughts in order. The Duke was here ! Who then, was the other ? Deodato had made his mistaken guess from an imperial and a pair of pointed moustaches—they might belong to almost anybody in the Palace ! But how could Ludovica be alone with a courtier in her bedroom at that time of the night ? Striking him like a tiny whip of a hundred lashes came the echo of Clementine Waldoz's malicious titter.

Ah, no ! It could not be ! It could not be ! Ludovica had sworn to him ! . . . Yet here was the verdict of his eyes to damn her ! Alone with a lover at midnight in that remote angle of the Palace with its exits, doubtless, on to the enclosed garden. Always he had felt she was not being frank with him. She had fooled him, fooled him by an appeal to the superstition she supposed might still linger in the mind of a former *Frate*. Ah ! What infamy, that perjured oath ! She was like the other women of the Tuileries then ! A poisonous cloud of indecent innuendo rose up and covered him with a night blacker than that in which he stood. They were all the same, those women, he frantically told himself—the Palace was one great, gilded brothel.

For a moment he wondered what Smolensk's role could be in the affair ? Complaisance ? It seemed unlike his haughty ferocity ; but there were plenty of such husbands at Court ! If he were not conniving, what a mad risk she ran, in case he returned unexpectedly as he had seemed about to do ! But, no doubt, she had taken her precautions. So consummate, so grandiose a deceiver would not be trapped for lack of a duenna, an *âme damnée* to give warning, or a secret stair of escape in this ancient royal labyrinth. Truly she belonged to it, to the craft and cruelty of the Renaissance, to

this Palace of evil memories, where a queen had once murdered her lover !

Ludovica had murdered *him*. Done worse than hire a dagger or mix a potion to deprive him of his life. She had wrecked his ideal, laid waste his soul, left him with a desert of years stretching before him as barren as the landscape he had discerned from the cliff where he had saved her a few hours since from rushing on destruction. This was her gratitude !

Deodato leaned against a tree under the moon, convulsed with sobs that would have earned him the ironical laughter of his brother-officers in the *Dragons de la Garde*, if they had learned the cause of them.

CHAPTER SIX

‘‘AUX ENFERS’’

(I)

“IS not that Captain Caprano in the parterre?” asked Princess Clementine Waldoz, leaning out of her box at the Variétés and levelling her opera-glasses. Her husband, the Carpatho-Croatian Ambassador, a fattish man with a bush of sly red whisker and eyes whose hard glitter repelled any attempt to probe his thought, adjusted his double eyeglass on its black ribbon and followed her gaze.

“I think it is,” he chuckled. “And he looks as if his initiation into the Guard has been too much for his liver.”

“He looks worse than that,” said Clementine curtly. “Signal to him to come up to our box, if you can catch his eye, Stefan!” Her lips twitched eagerly. “I scent something piquant when a young Guardsman and a favourite of the Court moons about the gangways at the Variétés looking as if he had come to be guillotined instead of to listen to an *opéra bouffe*. . . . Catch him quick, before he escapes into the foyer.”

“I will catch him for you, Clementine,” said her husband obediently. “I know you must be amused when the curtain is down as well as when the curtain is up,” and with a curved, enigmatic smile he descended to the stalls, leaving the Princess digging the handle of her fan impatiently into the green plush ledge of the box, while her diamonds shone in the night of her hair and a gauzy wisp of a scarf floated round her thin shoulders. It was an *entr’acte* in the performance of “La Belle Hélène,” Offenbach’s latest success, resuming the vein of persiflage against the deities of Olympus which had carried his “Orphée aux Enfers” to triumph; and it was nearly two months since the day of the hunt at Fontainebleau when she had last seen Deodato. Princess Clementine was all agog to know what had happened to change the young man so much in the interval.

He came listlessly into the box, after a while, with her husband,

and saluting her almost in silence, sat down on the chair next to her, to which she pointed with her fan. Prince Waldoz, murmuring an excuse, strolled out again into the corridor and lit a cigar. Clementine thought that the young officer looked almost exhausted as he sank down into his fauteuil and turned his eyes heavily towards the stage, upon which the curtain had just risen again. Fanning herself slowly as the music welled up from the pit of the orchestra just underneath them, she kept her great dark eyes fixed upon him, trying to divine his secret while, as if anxious to avoid conversation, he stared at the players.

Amid a scene of billowing clouds and baroque architecture the high deities of Olympus were assembled, decked in their sacred robes and hieratic symbols, but with faces of mocking human infirmity. They seemed to Deodato's idle thoughts to be parodies of a parody, carrying to brutal extravagance the delicate mockery of the antique gods which inspired the lighter moments of the school of Bernini. . . . And the Roman associations of the spectacle again drove the point home in his wound. There seemed to be nothing left now of his youth that had not been defiled with cynical laughter, nothing left of his ideal, the ruins of which were rapidly receding across the gulf of what must be, he judged, an eternal separation.

For he had not, after all, been content with the evidence of the shadows on the blind against Ludovica. He had been willing to reject the testimony of his eyes, to believe that some innocent explanation could still be given of that incredible nocturnal assignation with the stranger who had touched her so familiarly upon the shoulder. He had made an opportunity for Ludovica to explain, to deny; and she had met him with only a white face and a proud and resentful indignation. She refused absolutely to give any account of her visitor or to utter a syllable of self-exculpation. She behaved as though the whole wrong had been his in spying upon her (as she put it) and in doubting her oath, taken on what she held most holy.

So much did her attitude appear to Deodato to deepen her guilt that he flew at last into one of his wild rages, and left her after savage taunts and cries of disillusionment. . . . And he thought he would carry with him till his death the memory of the mingled anger and agony of her face, the brown eyes dilated in a kind of fixed amazement, like that, he thought, of some noble woodland creature transfixed by the arrow of an unsuspected assailant. . . .

It was that face he was seeing now in place of the painted jocosity on the countenances of the actors.

"What is the matter with you, *mon Capitaine*?" asked the guttural voice of the Princess suddenly in his ear. "You look as if Fate had flung the dice against you like cannon-balls!"

"A *migraine*," he answered, shrugging his shoulders.

Clementine smiled with a touch of bitterness. "It would be useless, I suppose, to suggest that you should tell me the truth? That you should treat me as a friend? A woman's counsel, you know . . . at any rate in a certain class of affair. . . ."

"My miserable affairs are too petty for Princess Clementine Waldoz to be troubled with them."

"In less polite words you would not dream of confiding in *la Princesse Chiffon*!" A spark flashed in the depth of the purple eyes. "To you I am always not a woman but a Parisienne." She fluttered her fan angrily. "In any case, I can guess what has befallen you. It is clear that you have refused to take my warning . . . which was that of a friend, I assure you. I could give you," she added, "another piece of good advice now, if I thought that you would listen to me."

"Alas! It would not profit me, Princess, if you did. I shall soon be out of all this, I believe."

A bacchanalian chorus swept up from the stage and drowned their conversation for the moment. Deodato recalled how he had fingered his pistol on returning to barracks after that interview with Ludovica. . . . He believed that if he had not put it to his temple it was from compunction for his father, the odd, only half-affectionate old man who would yet receive as a stroke the loss of the son he had recovered with such difficulty and set so many ambitions upon. He owed *mon oncle* too much to cheat him in that way. And yet . . .

The Princess suddenly bent across and said to him with a piercing look. "What do you mean, you believe you will soon be out of all this? Are they thinking of ordering the Guard to Mexico?"

"The Guard?" Deodato stared at her, bewildered. Then he uttered a harsh laugh. "I could not think what you meant at first! You imagined, did you, that you had pounced upon another morsel of news, to send to Zagreb or Vienna? No, of course the Guard is not going out . . . so far as I know."

"Then you are going out of the Guard?"

"*Mon Dieu*, yes; it is possible . . . and out of a great deal else, too."

She shot him another of her penetrating glances. "Don't be a fool!" she said with a bluntness that she had forced her circle to accept as part of her social pose. "Why must you always make me feel such an old, old woman with your boyish absurdities? What! Has life lost its power to amuse, just because that overgrown schoolgirl has not had the tact to conceal . . ."

"Princess, I beg of you!" he interrupted. "You cannot understand."

"Indeed? And do you think I was never young enough to make a fool of myself under the sway of—that lady?" She pointed her fan at the figure of Venus, who, tall in her elaborate chignon and high-heeled, gilt cothurni, was cooing a seductive stanza. "You are the most ungallant man I have ever met," said Clementine, "and I wonder why I take all this trouble over you. After all, what is it to me if you do send a pistol-shot through the vacant chambers where your brain should be? Still, I will try to teach you a little wisdom, *mon Capitaine*. In six weeks you will find what has happened has been a great blessing to you."

"Make me believe that!"

"Well, has it not opened your eyes? It has drained your system of the obscuring poison of passion, at any rate for a little while. Now you may begin to understand that a different kind of life is possible—one infinitely more amusing, infinitely more worth while."

"What life, pray?"

"The life of intelligence, my friend! Come, you are not a brute, Captain Caprano! You are not just one of these silly Lancers, Dragoons or Cent-Gardes, with no idea in life but their horses and their mistresses—valuing them in that order, as indeed the horse is usually the more intelligent animal of the two. No! No! You have a mind, my friend, deep though you try to bury it. You have some artistic gift, too, though I cannot say how much, since you have never tried to employ it yet."

"A harsh judgement, Princess!" answered Deodato, smiling palely, but interested in spite of himself.

"No. You have so far used your art only to indulge your vapourings, your day-dreams and your escapes from reality, never to express the reason of things. Have you read '*Madame Bovary*'? . . . I thought not; Flaubert is not *your* author. . . . You are a male *Mme. Bovary*, my dear friend, but you could be better. It

only you had the eye of Gustave Flaubert, cold, sad and dry, but *mon Dieu*, what fruitful harvests of the mind he reaps! So might you, too, in your own medium, if you were strong enough."

"Flight from life to the ivory tower of art? That is an ancient fallacy, Princess!"

"I do not urge that. I commend art as the clear-sighted vision of life. If you used it for that, you would soon be cured of these adolescent woes that still disturb you so prodigiously. Flight is vain, of course . . . and so is suicide. Suicide is only the last, exasperated affirmation of life and its cravings, as Schopenhauer teaches us. What we all need is release from life, the great Illusion, through the critical intelligence. That is the way to peace . . . the way to satisfaction."

Deodato gazed at her curiously. A little light had crept back into his dulled eyes; for the moment the haunting face of Ludovica dissolved from his imagination. The riddle of Clementine Waldoz aroused a brief interest in him. He recalled the savage energy of her attack upon the stag at Fontainebleau, the sudden spasm of passion with which she had declared to him in the palace gardens that she would surrender all her triumphs if she could be loved wildly, stupidly, by some simple-minded fellow—like himself, she had said, but that was doubtless one of the deliberate Waldozian impudences. He meditated, too, on her restless political intriguing, on her zest for the contemptible laurels of society and gossip-mongering. And it was this woman of a hundred unregulated desires and ambitions who now sat in the most frivolous theatre of Paris, and preached to him, while Offenbach uncorked bottle after bottle of his frothy musical champagne, the merits of the new Stoicism . . . Schopenhauerism . . . Westernised Buddhism . . . what was the thing to be called?

While he thus studied her, intrigued by her fiery contradictions, a shadow fell suddenly over her face. It was the curtain rolling down at the end of the act and cutting off the light from the stage. It left her, Deodato thought, looking more mysterious than ever, with her enormous eyes at the moment lost in reflection, her ugly mouth pouting forward, and the delicate antennæ of one hand fingering her diamond ear-ring.

He rose and apologised to Prince Waldoz, who had returned a few moments before the end of the act, for his prolonged intrusion into his box.

"But do not leave us yet, Captain Caprano!" cried Clementine in her affected, society voice. "We are going to sup at the Café Riche. Make one of us, if you find yourself alone in Paris this evening. Solitude breeds the little blue devils. Come with us and I," she tapped her pointed, white teeth behind her thick lips with her fan. "I will give you another little lesson in philosophy!"

"I," purred the Ambassador, taking the cue complaisantly from his wife, "cannot offer you any other wisdom than that which may lurk in a bottle of *la Veuve Cliquot* . . . not a disagreeable school-mistress in her own way, I hope? Clementine, if *M. le Capitaine* has no objection, shall we go before the last act? You agree? Good! This operette is amusing, but shocking. Every line of it is directed against the régime, and I am not sure that in our position we ought to have been seen here. And I do not think the music is at all up to the mark of 'Orphée aux Enfers.' That was a masterpiece, if you like! Tra-la-la! Tra-la-la-la!" and humming the music of the Galop, he watched while Deodato helped his wife to wrap her opera-cloak round her skeleton of a figure, before following her out of the box.

(2)

The lilt of that infernal Galop in the Ambassador's strident whistle seemed to follow Deodato down all his ways during the months that followed.

At the Café Riché, they had joined a party of raffish men of fashion, *cocodès*, as the slang of the boulevard termed them, and of society women daring enough to wish to taste the forbidden fruit of this famous haunt of pleasure in a private room. Among them Deodato recognised Vaulancourt, who was known to be a *soupirant* after the Princess, but who seemed to be out of favour and looked exceedingly ill-content. After rather defiantly gay greetings supper was served, and the vital energy of youth in Deodato re-asserted itself with a savage force against the self-destructive impulses that had been luring him lately towards the dark gulf. He had summoned to his aid the only force at his command—the vein of cynicism branded into him by his London experiences. If the bubbling of *la Veuve Cliquot* intensified his scintillation at this half-fearful, half-reckless party, it was an unneeded stimulant; his resentful soul was enough

to sustain him. All the satyr in him blazed out as the revel proceeded from decorum to freedom amid louder and louder laughter. His eyes flamed impudently; his sculptured nostrils pulsed with the fashionable sneer; one of the lady guests—her husband was an officer in Mexico, and the corsage she had borne with dignity through the halls of the Tuileries had become daringly un-brooched—voiced the general verdict when she cried out delightedly, “*Est-il assez canaille? Eh! bon Dieu! est-il canaille, Monsieur le Capitaine?*”

In all this Deodato was feverishly conscious that he was acting a double part. Acting to conceal the hollow desolation in his heart, and acting to attract the notice of Clementine Waldoz. All the time he was trifling and flirting with the complaisant, slightly dishevelled blondes on his right and left he was really watching, out of the corner of his eye, the Ambassadors at the end of the table. With a characteristic change of whim, Clementine was now sitting moody and silent, barely addressing her neighbours, one of whom was the sulky Vaulancourt, but drinking glass after glass of champagne with bored, brooding eyes, and presently lighting a long, dark cigar obsequiously proffered to her from a gaudily jewelled case by a compatriot among the men. There were some shocked little screams at this spectacle, and Prince Waldoz, with his jarring chuckle, asked pardon for his wife.

“*Excusez, Mesdames, c’est toujours Clémentine, vous savez!*”

Nor was Deodato any more successful in his attempts to engage her in talk. She answered in caustic monosyllables, although she had specially invited him to hear her wisdom, and this pricked him into fresh demonstrations of light-hearted indifference.

Taking their cue from the extravagance of the young Guardsman, the *cocodès* began to transform the party into a very mild imitation of the kind of orgy that was common in the mansions of the upper harlotry of the day—and the ladies were deliciously thrilled and frightened! One youth, by the aid of a champagne-cork singed at the pink-shaded candelabra, began to transform a classical mascarone with a big nose which projected in the centre of the sculptured mantelpiece into the likeness of *Badinguet* himself, with moustaches and imperial; another contrived to purloin his lady’s satin slipper under the table, and drank her health out of its heel.

Deodato, after borrowing a waiter’s pencil, offered to sketch symbolic portraits of the women on the tablecloth—portraying them as doves, as *amorini*, as skirted warriors, as Venus (there was a

shriek!) issuing from her bath. Presently there was a polite simulacrum of a scuffle behind the piano, and a reticule fell down and gaped, releasing a crimson lip-pencil. On this Deodato pounced, and marching up to the wall-mirror at the end of the room dashed upon it in fiery streaks an unmistakable Clementine Waldoz, lips and eyebrows, with two tiny horns completing her diabolical appearance. At that moment the Prince seated himself unsteadily on the piano stool and began to rattle off the Galop, which the gentlemen, as finale to the evening, proceeded to dance frenziedly, kicking their black legs into the air; while the ladies—feeling things had gone too far at last!—refused with screams to partner them in such a horror, and scattered like frightened mice in search of their wraps. . . .

Clementine seemed a trifle surprised when, but four hours after the break-up of the party, Deodato rode to meet her while she was taking an early morning canter in the Bois, followed at a distance by her groom only, in the tasteless pale salmon and scarlet livery of the Embassy. But she did not appear displeased at the attention.

"I should have thought, Captain," she said, with a twitch of her thick mouth, "that you would have been still snoring—or groaning. My husband has been moaning for seltzer and sal volatile since six o'clock, and kicked out the Secretary to the Embassy who came to him with an urgent telegram at seven."

"I had hoped," answered Deodato, his eyes burning in a pallid face, and his mouth closed with the jut of the lower lip that betrayed his moods of determination, "I had hoped that there might be vacancies in the ranks of your bodyguard this morning. One has to snatch one's opportunities with Princess Waldoz."

The Ambassadress tossed back the dark-blue veil on her glossy top-hat, and shot him a curious side-glance.

"You enjoyed our supper-party last night?" she asked carelessly.

"Not a bit."

"Come, that's refreshingly frank, at least! Why not?"

"I went there solely for your company. You didn't throw me a word. None of your promised lesson in philosophy! So I have come to demand it now, *Mme. la Princesse*."

"I rather believe I told you once before, *M. le Capitaine*, that I am not a trooper in your squadron."

"Agreed." He smiled a little grimly. "You are the commander now, and I the follower."

"Then I command—'Gallop!'" and she set off through the still deserted alleys of the Bois at a pace of her little blood mare that left her groom pounding far behind, and was meant, Deodato guessed, to test his own ability to keep beside her. But the chargers of the officers of the Guard were as fine horseflesh as any Embassy could turn out, and he had no difficulty in keeping at the floating tail of her skirt.

She glanced at him once or twice, admiring his easy seat; and at length she smiled and slowed down the pace, for the rides were beginning to fill with other matutinal equestrians. As she trotted slowly along, greeting friends and acquaintances, he realised from the quirk at the corner of her lips that she was taking pleasure in showing off her new *cavaliere servente* to the fashionable cavalcade. Among those they met was Vaulancourt, to whom she gave the coldest of bows, and who positively scowled at Deodato as they went past him.

And suddenly Deodato remembered the last time he had ridden by a woman's stirrup-iron in the Bois, and began to cast nervous looks around him, for shame lest the Duke and Duchess of Smolensk should be out this morning.

"She is not here," said Clementine cuttingly, reading his glances. "The Empress is still at Saint-Cloud with the Ladies of the Palace. . . . And, since you seem still so interested, I will give you another piece of news. She is not going to Biarritz with her Majesty. She is going away in a day or two to the country—alone. She is unwell, they say, and needs a long rest. *M. le Duc* remains in attendance on the Emperor. It is all very curious—don't you think so?"

Deodato had flushed a dull red. He felt stifled under the summer sunshine with rage, humiliation and remorse. "You are a Court Circular *à cheval*, Madame," he retorted. "But does that news concern me?"

The cascade at the gap between the lakes glinted over the rocks among the slim, shimmering trees. "Adieu," said Clementine abruptly, drawing rein. "I must go home to breakfast."

Deodato had recovered himself, and looked at her with resolution again stamped on his face. "Still," he said, "you have barely spoken to me. When shall I see you next?"

"I shall be at the Opera to-night," she answered. "Everyone may see me there."

She set her horse in motion; then called to him over her shoulder,

with her veil blowing round her coiled dark hair. "I shall be at Mme. de Pourtalès' ball to-morrow evening—the last fête of this season. Have you a card?"

Deodato sat looking after her as she turned towards the Porte de Passy, his hands clenched on his saddle-bow, while the flamboyant Croatian groom trotted past him with a flourishing salute of his whip. He realised that Clementine meant to dangle him on her hook for as long as she pleased. But this only inflamed his resolution to conquer her . . . to carry her off from under the insolent eyes of the Vaulancourts and other suitors. A petty ambition, a voice deep in him said, a rash growth that had first protruded its shoots at the Variétés under the rays of her sympathy, had then shot up rankly under the rain of her rebuffs at the Café Riche, and now seemed to be positively choking him at the end of this contemptuous, tantalizing ride. Yet it was the only ambition he now had to fill the chasm made in his life by the disappearance of the Ludovica of his ideal; he must cling to it, if he were not to go crazed . . . and surely, surely there was a mystery worth probing in this elusive, exotic woman . . . Clementine Waldoz, whatever she might be, was not ordinary!

(3)

So began for Deodato a period of tormenting subservience. His days were now woven of a triple strand, all of it made febrile by the haunting spirit of Clementine Waldoz. There was first his regimental life at the barracks in Paris, where the *Dragons de l'Impératrice* were now quartered. This was a matter of routine, and with the aid of an excellent soldier-servant to attend to the brilliancy of his equipment—the principal concern of the Guard cavalry in peace-time—his military tasks fell into the back of his mind. Parades, reviews, spells of duty as Officer of the Day, even the all-important, supremely prized privilege of serving on the Sovereigns' escort when they drove out in the capital, were things that the now experienced young officer could take in his stride.

With his brother-officers of the Dragoons Deodato was neither popular nor unpopular. It was realised that he was no "clubman," had no taste for gambling and cared little for sport. But he was too good a horseman to be despised on that account; too courteous

and obliging in taking over other men's turns of duty when they wanted to be off, to make enemies; above all, too much respected for his Court connexions and possible career at the Tuileries not to be wooed with civility by the other careerists. Some jealous epigrams passed behind his back; some amused smiles at the obvious boredom of *M. l'Italien* during the sumptuous guest-night dinners in the gilded mess-room, where the horse-shoe table sparkled with crystal and silver candelabra and the band played in the antechamber; these were all the criticisms provoked by the peculiarities of Captain Caprano.

Perhaps the only moments at which his soldierly service to the Empire passed from ritual to a sense of reality were the few occasions when, helmeted, and resplendent in green tunic and white plastron, he had the honour of acting as officer of the escort to the Empress on her drives. Eugénie never failed to recognise “her” cadet, her paladin, and always gave him a peculiarly gracious smile on entering and leaving the daumont. From that whispers flew about that Captain Caprano would soon be elevated to the rank of *Officier d'Ordonnance* to the Emperor, and Deodato knew that his father worked tirelessly to that end. But it was no hope of personal advance that gave him a warm and proud feeling when he rode beside the Empress's carriage-wheel. His loyalty to Eugénie (which had been exposed to no tarnish from a too-close observance of her feminine foibles) remained what it had been from the first moment he saw her. No cynicism, no disillusionment marred its constancy. It was a devotion free from the restlessness and hunger of sex—for Deodato was not fool enough to dream of becoming a *soupirant* after such a rigid and inaccessible majesty; and now that his love for Ludovica, which blended the earthly and the idealistic in a single burning passion, had been quenched to smouldering cinders, the star-like Empress was alone left to supply the need, subconscious but inherent in his complex nature, for some object of religious self-dedication. He hardly realized that he would have fled from the convent long before he did, but for this strain of mystical fervour in him.

Nevertheless, though ready in all moods to fight to the last of his strength for the Empire which had made him—the Empire, whose soldier rather than France's he felt himself, for he had no drop of French blood in him, and knew no corner of the country really outside Paris; though ready to fight to the last for Napoleon, and for Eugénie who had become his enthroned ideal, Deodato

always felt something of a tin soldier in his uniform. He real self would begin to come back to him when he slipped away to the little studio he had rented on the Left Bank in a still undemolished old street on the slopes of Mont Sainte-Geneviève, almost under the shadow of the Panthéon dome, and not very far from the Rue Mouffetard, where he had once lodged with the ineffable Dubonnet. Here he would get into the comfort of blue silk blouse and velvet beret—a *cocodès'* version of a sculptor's working-dress—and bury himself in work upon clay models of which no *cocodès* could have dreamed. So at any rate his master Gustave Carpeaux would grunt, when he saw any of his work either in the class at his own *atelier* or on brief calls at Deodato's miniature workshop.

Carpeaux, puffing at his pipe, with his rude, labourer's face and violent gestures, would growl at the waste of an artist's talent in mounting guard or riding escort. "You will do nothing, my boy," he would asseverate, while his straggling goat-beard vibrated with his emotion, "so long as your life is split in two like this. What the devil! I am the loyal servitor of the Emperor too . . . and I think I have done something to prove it . . . but I do not feel it necessary to flourish a sabre instead of my carving-tools!" Deodato would smile at the military air of this scorner of his uniform, but he understood his Master's high vocation to immortalise the Empire and its spirit in stone. The last rays of the glory of Bernini rested upon this rugged head. As the mighty Italian had glorified the magnificence of the Renaissance Papacy, so this Frenchman, trained in Rome, had embodied the happy prosperity of the Empire in the laughing mouth and splendid, supple hips of his Flora, enshrined upon the Pavilion of her name in the Tuileries, and had set its grandeur flaming in the figure of Imperial France that queened it in another niche of the same sublime monument. So when Carpeaux said to Deodato, grumblingly, "You have the one thing necessary, the one thing I adore—the passion for life as it elevates itself towards the Deity . . . but you have everything to learn . . . and you won't give the time to learn it, my friend!" the pupil was filled with exaltation and worry, wondering how he could free himself to fulfil his ever-thwarted, life-long vocation.

Those words had been flung at him only a few days before the overthrow of his life caused by his breach with Ludovica—and since then how much farther off he was from liberating his artistic soul!

What profit could it be to his art—the question answered itself—

to be pursuing this lean devil of a woman with the enthralling eyes and repellent lips through the empty parades of society—the task to which Deodato, in the grip of a small, tenacious clutch that he could not shake off, devoted his spare hours from regimental duty when society began to drift back to Paris after the summer holiday? To dinners, to balls, to theatrical *premières*; to the Bois, to church; to charity bazaars, to tableaux vivants in private houses he followed the riddling, cynical, elusive Ambassadors, hungry for a glance, for a few words—and furious, when these were gained, at gaining no more. It was a social education, but it stole the hours that the studio on Mont Sainte-Geneviève should have claimed; and though Clementine loved art-jargon, and was a habituée of the Salon, of private views and the studios of new artists with sensational doctrines, Deodato found he gained nothing from her theories and criticisms. . . . Nothing except a loss of confidence in his own impulses and his quickly abandoned attempts at work. He seemed always to hear her titter over his shoulder, see the thick lips twitching with the suppressed disdain she was so adroit in conveying. . . .

Through all his desperate courtship he was haunted by an utterance he had heard one night behind his back at somebody's reception. "The Waldoz is *canaille*, that is her pose—but she has never crossed the Rubicon. She does not mean to forfeit her place as a *grande dame*." Was that true? Was that the secret of her thousand unsatisfied impulses, whims, crazes? That and the fact, for which he pitied her, that the only fruit of her marriage was a male child with a malformed head, who showed small signs of his intelligence awakening normally? Was it the explanation of her red-whiskered husband's supreme indifference to her antics, of his mechanical chuckle and murmured "*Voilà de ma Clémentine! Hélas, Messieurs, c'est toujours Clémentine!*" To bite at every fruit and eat none? A soul dessicated to a mere ironical intelligence . . . fundamental cowardice under flaunting bravado? Restlessly pacing the little studio, among the unfinished models on which the dust was collecting, and rubbing his hot palms together, Deodato refused to believe it . . . the ignominy of his chase would be then too terrible!

Certainly Clementine played with him like a cat with a mouse. A lustrous cat with gleaming eyes, patting, pawing and rending, she was making him a mouse, nothing better! His soul was shrinking

to a wisp ; his strong body, developed by military exercises, his gorgeous uniform, were becoming a wicker effigy concealing somewhere in its hollowness a piteous mite of a soul, scurrying and pointing about in quest of its one poor little satisfaction.

Why did he not break the thrall ? He asked himself this question one afternoon a few months after the beginning of his senseless pursuit, sitting with his chin cupped in his hands in the rickety little belvedere some predecessor had built at the end of the strip of garden opening out of the studio. Before him spread the panorama of Paris from the Left Bank, under an autumn sky of a faint, metallic blue—the cupola of the Invalides gleaming dully to his left above the vividly outlined verdure of the Luxembourg Gardens ; the conical towers of the Tuileries and the pallid arcadings of Notre-Dame rising just beyond the gash of the river in front ; bosky Père-Lachaise, with its peeping monuments ; nude Montmartre, lifting the arms of its windmills in solitary majesty to the north, all hushed and still, it seemed, in the tranquillity of the falling year. Why did he not break the thrall ?

Because Clementine, he knew, had the power to prevent him. Once already she had seen the danger-signal in his eyes, after some conspicuous piece of rudeness, and the next night she had let him scrawl his initials upon half the dances in her programme at a ball they both attended ; and in dancing with him she had bound fresh invisible cords about him, because of her tantalising lightness and impalpability. Skimming across the gossamer web of a Waldteufel valse she achieved a curious effect of giving and withdrawing a caress from her partner—and inflaming the desire for more. . . . She knew, Deodato bitterly realised, how to keep him dangling on her hook—for ever and a day. He was not the only one, and that made it more humiliating still.

(4)

The second time the bond nearly snapped came more than half a year later. The quarrel arose from a sneer against Ludovica uttered by Clementine while lolling in a hammock in the park of the Château at Saint-Cloud, with Deodato in attendance. (His presence at Saint-Cloud had again woken the rumours about his approaching promotion to the Household.) Perhaps Clementine had some excuse

besides the prolonged spell of broiling weather for exasperated nerves, for it was the month of June, 1866, and the Austrian Empire, of which her Prince's dominions formed a part, was facing war on two fronts, against Prussia and against Italy.

When Clementine had exhausted her waspish taunts against the Prussian Chancellor Bismarck (who was fast coming to seem not quite the crazy Prussian *Junker* that his bull-dog look of a country squire and his calculated indiscretions had so long suggested), it was natural that she should have her fling at “ the Italian woman, nursing her wounded virtue in Lorraine,” and thank God that “ we are spared that intriguer, for one, to-day ! ”

A sudden flame mounted in Deodato, as he listened. He would have said that he resented the taunt because he knew it was aimed directly at annoying him ; the Duchess of Smolensk's character, he would have declared angrily, was no longer any concern of his. He had put his own interpretation, no doubt, upon her obvious breach with her husband, and her prolonged retirement, on the plea of poor health, first to a little Normandy seaside resort, then (he had heard) to a convent, and at last to the Duke's estate on the hills outside Metz. But he would have protested that the matter was one in which he was no longer in the least interested.

In truth, however, there was an irreconcilable contradiction in his attitude towards Ludovica. What his mind believed, his soul rejected. He clamoured in his own ears that she was a perjurer and defiled, to drown the swelling cry of his heart, for which she remained, in spite of all his efforts to ignore her, the lodestar of his existence. That was why he had always (illogically by his own formulated belief) felt shame at his pursuit of Clementine Waldoz ; that was why he had never tried seriously to unmask the identity of the lover he had detected in her room that night at Fontainebleau. For a little while he had had the crazy notion that it might be the handsome *Grand Veneur*, Edgar Ney, Prince of Moskowa, but he soon realised that this was absurd. Then his suspicion had fallen on Vaulancourt ; but he quickly realised that it was not for the Duchess's favours that Vaulancourt was his rival. Then he had desisted from the search, telling himself that it was beneath his pride to care. And for the same illogical reason he now retorted tartly upon the Ambassadors under the sultry, menacing sky that seemed to touch the heads of the secular trees of the park, overhanging Paris from its hill.

"I do not love calumnies. You know, I never listen willingly to gossip. . . . And I fear I must return to take my uncle for a drive along the river."

"At least pick up my parasol before you desert me!"

Deodato's nerves trembled at the allurement of the delicately guttural voice. He stooped to pick up the parasol from the grass, and as he handed it to Clementine felt as if he were drowned in the swimming lustre of her purplish eyes. "I was going to say," she murmured, "that if you still wish to make that portrait model of me, I can find time to sit in your studio next week. My husband is making me a despatch-widow these days; he never leaves the Chancellery."

"You will really come?" cried Deodato, forgetting everything in the flush of his victory.

"Certainly; on Tuesday at three." She spoke seriously, with none of the evasive flippancy that usually shrouded her pledges. Deodato felt as triumphal as Cæsar, whose Life the Emperor had been compiling for a learned pastime, and who had consequently been the principal topic of conversation lately in the Court.

And in fact Clementine did not put him off more than twice before she really arrived at the little *atelier* in the shadow of the Panthéon, with its Oriental rugs, hanging lamp of beaten copper, and trophies of Algerian arms upon the walls. With characteristic contempt for the *convenances* she sent away her maid in the carriage that brought them, and took the pose that Deodato indicated, almost submissively. He thought she looked fatigued and depressed; and though that was not the best mood to catch her in for a living likeness, he welcomed it as an indication that perhaps the more serious Clementine was again making a fleeting apparition.

After some three-quarters of an hour's work on the clay, Deodato heard her sigh.

"I am tiring you?" he asked, looking up from his *maquette*. "It is terribly close in here, I am afraid. Would you like a little rest? We could take a breath of air in the summer-house in the garden. There are not too many earwigs. . . . Will you smoke a Turkish cigarette?" He smiled; "I do not keep cigars."

Clementine accepted his proposals with the same listless submissiveness, and they strolled out into the neglected strip of garden on the slope. Deodato had brought out a cushion which he placed

for her on the least rickety of the two rustic chairs in the belvedere. For a moment they sat side by side, looking silently, over the chimney-pots and tiles that covered the lower part of the hill, at the spectacle of Paris.

"There will be a storm, I think," remarked Deodato, observing how the threads of smoke from the chimneys hung straight in the sullen air.

"It has broken—for me!" replied Clementine in a sudden, hoarse voice with her deepest Teutonic inflection in it. "Ah! my friend, I heard the dreadful news just before I set out! I can keep it to myself no longer. My country has been defeated. There has been a great battle at a place in Bohemia called Sadowa. My husband learns that the Emperor of Austria's army was tumbled into ruin by the Prussians."

"By the Prussians? Not possible!" exclaimed Deodato, staring at her in amazement. "It is a rumour!"

"No, it is a fact. This week, my friend, a new, black star rises over Europe, the star of Bismarck. . . . You don't believe me, I see. . . . But let *your* Emperor look to his defences now. . . . Yes, let Paris look out and guard itself!" She raised her tiny fist, clenched, with the nails driving into her flesh, and shook it in warning over the heat-bound city at their feet.

Paris in danger! Deodato stared at it, incredulous. His Paris, the city of wonder which had never lost its enchantment for him since the vision it had offered on the first day of his arrival as an almost penniless vagabond from England! He knew it better now, no doubt—its slums and squalors, its deserted fringes round the cemeteries and outer boulevards, where crime and banditry flourished, its acres of ugly bourgeois life lived in the stuffy rooms of dull and narrow streets. Yet his Paris remained the shrine of Glory; the constellation of triumphal arches, palaces and parks, of churches glittering with a strained, dramatic emphasis of faith that put to shame the drowsy fervour of the Roman basilicas; the busy hive of artists, the pageant-ground of fashion; the seat above all of military power. All day the bands crashed in its streets, the spurs and sabres tinkled along its pavements, the uniforms filled its squares with tides of colour. The supreme creation of human intelligence, the greatest feat of adaptation to human needs and pleasures that the world had ever seen, all emanating from the sleepless brain-cells of the little gentleman with the short legs and pointed beard in the

Tuileries—how could anyone speak without absurdity of a threat to Paris?

And still he sat and gazed, with the thin, melancholy foreign woman by his side, while out of the East a huge purple cloud mounted . . . like a head it seemed to him . . . the first shaping of a lump for a head; his fingers instinctively traced the modelling it still lacked . . . a head in a helmet, you might make it, a helmet with a point formed by a fantastic spike of purple shooting up against the brilliancy of the fading sun. He heard Clementine's teeth chatter, and turned to look at her.

Tears were dropping slowly out of her immense dark eyes.

"You think I am a fool, I know," she sobbed, "I who believe in nothing . . . who say one should bear everything . . . with indifference. But what would you have, my friend? One's country! It is in the bones. It is stronger than I am. Ah! God! I am miserable; my mask is down, and there is no man can comfort me."

"Let us go in," Deodato said, gently touching her elbow, "before it rains."

The studio was dusky with the approach of the storm. Its atmosphere seemed tense and filled with electric fluids. Clementine sank down on the striped divan, lifting her scrap of a lace handkerchief to her eyes. "If there was one human soul," she wept, "to which I could turn in an hour like this!" Without warning, Deodato, overcome by the sultry tingling in the air, snatched her slender form into his embrace, clasping her tight to his breast for dread of her evanescence in his very arms. A strange perfume, reminding him a little of the bazaars of the East, diffused itself from her rustling silks, and still further intoxicated him. For a second she seemed to turn real in his clasp, and be on the point of yielding.

Then he heard her groan, and her little hands spread themselves against his hungry lips, pressing back his mouth, his head with a wiry strength. "Wait! Wait!" he heard her guttural voice murmuring, "do you want to spoil everything for a mad moment? My maid will be knocking on the door at any minute now! I have ordered her to. François, wait till we are really alone . . . I will tell you where!"

He hesitated, and in that second of hesitation she disengaged herself with an incredible suppleness from his arms, and ran to the door, holding it open. "I hear my carriage-wheels," she declared. "Do not follow me now, François! *Au revoir!*"

Deodato found himself alone in the gloom, his temples throbbing, his brain whirling. Why had he let her go? Had he secured a promise, or let himself be duped? How long was this exquisite torment to drag on, broiling his soul and body like an Indian execution over a slow fire? He fell on his divan, clutching at the damp tangles of hair on each side of his forehead. As he did so, he seemed to hear once more the strident whistle of Prince Waldoz, exulting in the Galop from “Orphée aux Enfers.”

GALA

(I)

OLD age, to which Count Caprano had opposed so tough a resistance for so long, had in these last years made terrible inroads upon his strength. More and more unrelentingly it nailed him to his hard First Empire arm-chairs in the sylvan hush of Cythère. He could only totter now on his feet with the help of Gustave his valet as well as his gold-knobbed cane, and even carriage exercise gave him pains—rheumatics and lumbago. The world of fashion did not put itself out very much to visit this decaying relic of a dead epoch buried in the depths of the Bois—Paris had other things to think of, worries and triumphs and excitements, as the pace of the present-day Empire quickened feverishly towards some widely presaged but undefined crisis.

Deodato was pained by this general neglect of the old man, and did what in him lay to give Orlando company and bring him gossip. He suffered with *mon oncle* in his solitude, attended only by the prim masks of servants in his gorgeous, empty villa, though he doubted whether he was capable of bringing his father much consolation. In the years of their acquaintance—nearly nine of them now—he could not honestly tell himself that he had grown into love of Orlando, nor did he believe that the fitful old courtier had grown into love, or even any deep affection, for him. Keen gratitude Deodato felt indeed for all that the old man had done so lavishly for him, offering his gifts, it is true, rather to the ideal of the son he would have liked to have than to the actual disconcerting creature, with his naïveté, his incalculability, and his satyr-like caprices tainting (from Orlando's point of view) his gifts and attractiveness.

By some ironical perversity the Count showed hardly the slightest sympathy with his son's artistic yearnings. Nothing could make him believe that an amateur could be a real artist: a real artist had a public status, was acknowledged by Schools and Salons, and had a price at the dealers. Far more than any commendation from Carpeaux, he valued the news that Deodato had taken the place of

a brother-officer in the saddle in some *concours hippique*, and won a prize for him, or that a General had commented at a review on the smart turn-out of his squadron (though all the work would have been done by the Adjutant and the other sergeants); and he had been palpably disappointed when some silly difference in the Mess which had seemed likely to involve Deodato in a duel had been honourably settled without swords.

Most trying of all was his rather disagreeable habit of trying to elicit from *mon neveu* details of the liaisons with women of which he suspected him far beyond his trivial peccadilloes in that field. He was usually very sardonic in these explorations, having a gnawing jealousy of youth, and Deodato took good care never to speak to him of any of his serious attachments. Yet Orlando, as has been seen, had detected enough of his son's feeling for Ludovica to taunt him with it; and he had been far more vitriolic when it became plain that Deodato had joined himself to the followers of *cette drôlesse, cette diablesse*, the Carpatho-Croatian Ambassadress.

Deodato hoped with a sigh that his father would not probe him on that topic, as he stood one afternoon at the beginning of June, 1867, in the grand salon of the villa. He was waiting for the summons to go upstairs to Orlando's huge granite and silver bedchamber, in which (subject to a summer cold) he had been lying for some days amid austere military emblems, his chosen decoration for the place of his dreams. Even if Deodato had been of a nature to prattle about his good and ill fortunes in love, he could have had no pride in detailing to any listener the last stages of his infinitely, gallingly spun-out affair with Clementine Waldoz, now approaching, he knew, a final explosion. He began to think of other topics he could feed the invalid with—gossip about the Universal Exhibition, now at the height of its triumph in its flag-hung, circular palace on the Champ de Mars, or his impressions of his first spell of duty as *Officier d'Ordonnance* to the Emperor, just concluded.

Before the stately Germain, who acted as major-domo, came to give him the usual ceremonious message, "*M. le Comte* will receive *M. le Capitaine*," a door of the salon opened, and there entered a little old gentleman in a tight frock-coat, with gold spectacles, piercing eyes and white hair brushed into a crest that made him look like a dapper cockatoo. He also had evidently been visiting the invalid, and had come to fetch a portfolio of papers he had deposited in the salon.

Deodato recognised him at once, though he had never met him at the Tuileries or in the circles he himself frequented. It was M. Adolphe Thiers, the most celebrated of France's elder statesmen, once Louis-Philippe's all-powerful Minister, long laid on the shelf of impotent hostility to the Empire, but latterly returned to vocal opposition in consequence of the régime of greater parliamentary liberty with which Napoleon had been experimenting in the last few years. His link with Count Caprano was his history of the Consulate and the First Empire, for which Orlando had furnished documents, and a desultory acquaintance had since persisted between the old imperialist and the old constitutional monarchist, both born in the same year.

The Nestor of French statecraft accepted Deodato's respectful salutation with a nod, but no relaxation in the curve of his thin, astute lips, and took his departure with self-important little steps. Then Deodato went upstairs to his father, and found that M. Thiers' visit had deeply depressed him.

"*Tout craque!*" he moaned, lying back on his pillows under his green-and-gold silk counterpane, while two ormolu heads of Grecian warriors on the bedposts listened impassively. "Disaster hangs over the Empire—I feel the brushing of its wings. May I not survive to see it! In these last years Napoleon has made nothing but mistakes. The Mexican adventure—now a total fiasco . . . our troops withdrawn, and the unhappy Emperor Maximilian, whom we set up there, in danger of his life hour by hour from the rebels! . . . Sadowa—a calamity! We should have checked Prussia last year . . . now it is too late! . . . The State endangered from within by this insane revival of parliamentary government—an Emperor cannot share his powers—Louis Napoleon, my son, is in decay. His health is breaking up; you have only to look at him. He wastes the fateful hours writing about Julius Cæsar! His foresight, his will are forsaking him. His heir is only a child, and worst of all he leaves everything now to that Spanish woman!"

"Pray remember, sir," smiled Deodato, "that I am one of her Imperial Majesty's own Dragoons. I ought not to listen to you, really! . . . And I think you paint too much black in your picture. The Emperor mediated after Sadowa, and gave Venice to the King of Italy. He still holds the balance of power in Europe. It seems to me that the visits of M. Thiers always leave you very low."

"Thiers is an old rogue," growled Orlando feebly. "But he is

a patriot in his own fashion. And he understands what he is saying in military matters. He says we should have re-organised our army after Sadowa, but the Emperor was too weak to insist . . . He says that he fears the fortifications of Paris, which he constructed himself, are being allowed to fall into decay . . . He says——"

"Come, sir! We are not going to allow the enemy to approach the walls of Paris. The Army of the Empire! *Que diable!*"

Orlando sighed, and laid his hand upon one out of two or three volumes of Thiers' history, which had been lying upon his night-table for some weeks. "The Army of the Empire," he said gravely, "has had its defeats. Who should know better than I? I have been reading lately about Moscow . . . what a horror! And about Leipzig . . . what a butchery!" He dropped the book, and stared for a moment into the gloom that was stealing into the great, austere chamber, with its silver laurel-wreaths on the walls, its bundle of spears supporting the bed-canopy, and its stucco helmets along the frieze. "Moscow . . . Leipzig . . . names fatal to France!" he murmured.

"Try Marengo, Austerlitz, Jena instead, sir!" answered Deodato, trying to rally him. "We are not going back to Moscow or to Leipzig either, believe me!"

But Orlando would not be coaxed from the dismal subject. "You have been to the Exhibition?" he asked. "The King of Prussia visited it, did he not? With that *tartufe* Bismarck! Did you see them?"

Deodato could not help smiling. His father's epithet for the Prussian Chancellor seemed to him felicitous. In fact he had almost bumped into the Prussian King, with his two satellites, Bismarck and General von Moltke, the recent victor of Sadowa, in a gallery of the Exhibition the day before, and anything less military-looking than these guests of the Emperor he had never seen. In their formal black clothes and top-hats, with Bismarck's white neckcloth gleaming conspicuous, they had looked more like three Lutheran clergymen than the new challengers to European supremacy. Followed by a throng of curious spectators, they had passed from room to room, the King smiling, Moltke pressing snuff into his parchment nostrils, Bismarck chattering and guffawing into his Sovereign's ear, as if he had not a care behind his domed forehead.

Just for a moment, indeed, an odd shadow had fallen upon the trio. They had entered the section of arms where, amid specimens of the artillery of every nation, an immense Prussian siege-gun from

Krupp's lifted its black muzzle, towering, into the air. In a single movement the three heads, Bismarck's silver-fringed cannon-ball of a skull, Moltke's starved eagle profile, King Wilhelm's white-whiskered mask of a benevolent old fox, turned and regarded the giant, while the trio halted in perfect dressing. From the adjoining parts of the building came the ripple of talk and laughter; somewhere in the distance a band was playing the song of the Grand-Duchess of Gerolstein, from Offenbach's latest triumph, at this moment the rage of Paris and her visitors:

"Voici le sabre,
Le sabre,
Le sabre!
Voici le sabre,
Le sabre de mon père!"

Then with an equally mechanical uniformity the three visitors turned their eyes front, and went on their way without a word, each gazing silently before him—as it might be the pastors preparing their Sunday sermons.

Deodato did not dwell on this. It would not help to cheer *mon oncle*. He spoke instead of the magnificent ball to be given the following night to all the visiting Sovereigns in the great central Salle des Maréchaux at the Tuileries, at which he himself, although he would not be an officer on duty, would attend in his gala uniform as a member of the Household. . . .

"And waste your evening dangling after the petticoat strings of *la Waldoz*, I suppose!" interjected his father.

Well: it had to come, no doubt! *Mon oncle* would not let the afternoon pass without some attack on the seductress he so deeply loathed. . . . And indeed, Deodato confessed to himself, as he listened to his father's grumblings, if Orlando knew all the facts about the wretched affair he might well be more contemptuous still.

For Clementine's conduct since that afternoon when she had (deliberately beyond a doubt) provoked and rebuffed him in the studio, had been all of a piece, and with anyone not besotted like Deodato with injured pride and jealousy, would have ensured revolt. After her flight from the studio she had insisted she could never dream of granting Deodato the rights of a lover except in the most careful circumstances of disguise and concealment. Her husband, she declared, was a Croat whose ideas of marital authority were mediæval. He would probably take her back to his castle outside

Zagreb and do her to death with torture on the battlements . . . Deodato might smile ; but Paris was a very different place from Croatia. They were, however, Deodato suggested, in Paris, where a pistol-shot or a crossing of blades between him and the Prince was the worst that was likely to happen, if they were so indiscreet as to be found out. Clementine grimaced, and clapped her hands over her ears at the horrid thought of shots. " And besides," she pleaded, " you would make me look a fool ! Come now, be reasonable, and I will tell you my idea."

Her idea, as it turned out, was but another ingenious pretext for fobbing him off, and indulging in her taste for the *canaille*. Let them both, she pleaded, adopt the clothes of the people ; go to quarters and places of popular resort, and there, lost in the crowd, and amid the atmosphere of irresponsible gaiety . . . *mon Dieu*, who knew what might happen ?

Deodato had no choice but to fall in with her scheme—faintly hoping that if she exchanged the clothes of the Ambassadors for those of the *midinette* she might in the masquerade lose her fears and scruples. And so, disguised himself as a student from the Quartier Latin, he took her boating on the Seine, dancing, heavily veiled, amid the gaudy fairy-lamps of the Closerie des Lilas, supping and donkey-riding at the Château Rouge and under the Tour de Solférino on Montmartre. At all these plebeian places of entertainment he was astounded by the zest with which she stripped herself of her refinement, and allowed the coarsest phrases to come out of her thick mouth ; it was evident that she found in these vulgar revels an outlet for some deep instinct in her soul—perhaps the ancestral memories of gypsy vagabondage.

It was also plain that she was now playing with fire to the limit of her daring, placing herself, as she did, so wholly in the power of a man of meridional blood, stirred to an exasperation of passion. But her craftiness in eluding him was infinite ; she remained, when all else had been changed by a cheap skirt and a flaunting bonnet, the woman who " never crossed the Rubicon." In London Deodato had known a girl who loved to give herself in such sordid circumstances. At least she had been real, Madeline ! This parody of a low-life passion revolted Deodato. But it was all Clementine intended, and if ingenuity would not serve her she was prepared for something bolder.

The most reckless of her feats of provocation was when one night

she let herself lie beside him on the turf slopes of a deserted corner of the fortifications . . . those fortifications constructed by Thiers for King Louis-Philippe, now neglected, grass-grown, without guns or garrison. She must, it seemed, taste the supreme thrill of stretching herself beneath the stars in this classic place for the seduction of servants and shopgirls. And then, when Deodato lost his head, she suddenly produced a little Balkan dagger and pointed it at his breast, while her teeth grinned mockingly through her thick lips in the misty light. He turned from her, disgusted at such play-acting. Upon that, as if realising that with this prey the sport was played out—that the hunted huntsman must now realise his true rôle—she fell again to lecturing Deodato amid the teacups in her stately drawing-room at the Embassy on the emptiness of feeling, the delights of a passionless intelligence; and when she saw the hate with which he glowered upon her elegantly attired form, as she sat aristocratically waving a sequin-sewn fan in her petal-like fingers, she tried to cast him out altogether from her acquaintance, resuming a demonstrative flirtation with the Marquis de Vaulancourt to give him the *coup de grâce*. That was to be the end, in her view, of this nearly two year's intimacy of frustration. But such was not Deodato's view of the end. . . .

"I had hoped," Orlando's fatigued voice came grumbling through his reverie, "that I might see you married and settled before I went to join the grand parade of the old Emperor's army by the Styx . . . they don't reject you for lameness there! Not that I am a fervid devotee of marriage . . . but to see the line carried on, that is a seducing idea, at moments! But you seem to have a genius for wrong attachments. First that Italian woman, with her head full of political intrigues, and God knows what ugly secret behind her window-blinds . . . the Duke of Smolensk could tell, I suppose. And then this worthless parakeet, *la Princesse Chiffon*! My boy, you have not your father's taste in women!"

"I am sorry, father," said Deodato with a sincere tremble in his voice. "I am afraid I am a disappointment to you, and that you are sorry you picked me out of the gutter."

"By no means," said Orlando proudly. "The gutter was no place for my son . . . and after all," a touch of his old, whimsically charming smile came into his withered face, "you ride well; you look like a Caprano in your uniform; the Empress told me the last time I attended at Saint-Cloud, 'Your nephew, Count, is one of my

ornaments !' *Allons !* I forgive you, my 'nephew' ! Go, and let me sleep now ! "

(2)

Deodato did not propose that his relations with *la Princesse Chiffon* should die in the peaceful disdain with which she hoped to dispose of him. One more meeting, at least, he was resolved to have, if only to try whether words could pierce her self-complacency, could make her see her soul in the mirror of truth.

How best to bring this about was the thought that filled his mind the next evening as he stood in his silver epaulettes, with his black-plumed cocked hat in his hand, amid a scented ocean of billowing silks, a prismatic scale of uniforms, in the immense Hall of the Marshals, rising to the height of two storeys under the central cupola of the Tuileries. Beneath the gilded interior dome, in the blinding glitter of the forest of crystal pendants hanging from the bloated chandeliers, the full pomp of the Imperial Court was displayed. The Staircase of Honour, approaching the ballroom, was lined with the living statuary of the Cent-Gardes, the pennons of their trumpeters at the foot of the ascent hanging motionless as banners in a cathedral. Competing in variety of colour with the pictured uniforms of the Marshals of the First Empire upon the walls, were the liveries of the ushers, chamberlains, equeries and Household Officers, completed to-night by the gold-laced splendour of the Grand Master of Ceremonies and his staff in their violet tails and white breeches ; while the empty thrones of the Sovereigns, ranged on a long dais, gave a note of tense expectancy. Far away in the Salon de la Paix, a string-band was softly playing.

This magnificence was familiar enough to Deodato, as he stood restlessly twirling his little imperial. What struck his fancy, rather, was the fateful solemnity with which, like brooding giantesses with their feet bathed in the foam of the ball-dresses seething below them, the four colossal bronze caryatides supporting the central gallery above the row of unoccupied thrones seemed to dominate the frivolous assemblage . . . Then, passing beneath the inexpressive gaze of the Marshals of the first Napoleon overhead, he remarked three well-known military figures of the present day, conversing lightly together—General Bourbaki, with his handsome, half-Greek face, a legend of dash and daring in the Crimea and Italy ; the eternal General Sertignes de Messimy, rather more bent, rather more withered,

but with all his accustomed *aplomb* ; and Marshal Bazaine, stouter and more like an impassive Mandarin than ever. His reputation had become an enigma since the Court blamed him for failing in Mexico while the Opposition swore by *notre glorieux Bazaine*, the only scientific soldier, they maintained, in the French Army.

Suddenly the murmured conversations round Deodato snapped off. There was a stir and rustle all through the great Hall, followed by a dead silence, in which from the Salon of the First Consul, that opened the glittering suite of rooms stretching from the Hall of the Marshals to the private apartments of the Sovereigns, a voice could be heard proclaiming, " Their Imperial and Royal Majesties ! " Deodato stood on tip-toe, craning his neck . . . but not for a glimpse of royalty.

He saw, nevertheless, in the space opened for the imperial cortège, the Emperor, walking slowly and rather painfully, with his great head sunk sideways upon his shoulders, behind the backward-pacing Grand Chamberlain in his gala dress of scarlet and gold ; the Empress floating, swan-like as ever, on the arm of the tall, melancholy Tsar, the celebrated single diamond known as " the Regent " coruscating on her bosom ; the point of the Prussian King's whiskers . . . and then a throng of lesser royalties—Prince Jerome Napoleon, the Emperor's cousin, a plump and puffy edition of Napoleon the Great, his peevish eyes glinting ferret-like and destroying the beauty of his Bonaparte mask ; the Prince's pallid, devout Italian wife, Princess Clotilde of Savoy ; Princess Mathilde Bonaparte, with her severe, intellectual face . . . and he was not for the moment interested in any of them.

He was waiting impatiently for the procession of the *corps diplomatique*, which he knew would follow the Sovereigns', and after a short pause he saw it making its way through the throng, while the ushers with difficulty kept the passage clear for it. Deodato caught a glimpse of the fez of the Turkish Ambassador towering above the bare heads round him ; then detected the diamonds blazing on the Russian Ambassador's uniform. Nigra, the envoy of Italy passed, smiling and captivating as ever with his flowing moustaches ; and then the dark-whiskered Austrian, Prince Metternich, with his wife, Clementine Waldoz's detested rival in wit, chignons and fascinating ugliness. But Deodato had no eye for Pauline Metternich, since close behind her he saw the gleam of the Carpatho-Croatian Ambassador's auburn hair and his double eye-glass ribbon

. . . and then in an instant Clementine, shimmering in her favourite reddish purple, her cloudy hair scintillating with gems, her mouth (as always on official occasions) prim and haughty, and her eyes, rather strained and sunken to-night, seeming to swallow the whole room.

The shuffle and fall of feet continued while the Imperial procession ranged itself along the seats up on the dais, and the *corps diplomatique* sought their own places on another reserved platform opposite. In the gallery a second band was pouring forth the stately romance of "Partant pour la Syrie"; overhead the golden dome shone serenely and benignly; on the walls the twelve Marshals of the First Empire, with their full-blooded, heavy-jowled faces and hawk-like eyes, stood on guard over their Master's heir; acknowledging him too, Deodato felt, ready at a word to snatch their curved sabres from their scabbards and defend him as they had defended his Uncle. For all the disarray of his spirit, and the cracks of cynicism that had been deepened in his nature by his Parisian experience, Deodato felt once more the throb of loyalty. How motiveless were the forebodings of *mon oncle* on his sick-bed in Cythère! His eyes instinctively sought the Empress in the snowy plumage of her ball-dress, her cameo profile pure and happy, the great star shining like Hope upon her breast. No, there was nothing to trouble about—outside the storm in his own bosom.

Then he watched Napoleon passing with bowed shoulders to his throne. Eugénie curtsied to the guests, awaking an irrepressible murmur of admiration by the grace of her movement, and all the Sovereigns sat down, the French Emperor sinking into his seat under the brooding bronze giantesses with an air of relief. Again his greying head seemed to droop, as his vague, mild eyes roamed around the room behind their pouched lids. Decidedly he did not look well.

Deodato heard the remark made behind his back; and another voice whispering "Her Majesty wished to make it a costume ball, so that she might appear again as her favourite Marie Antoinette; but the Emperor dislikes her wearing that costume, you know." "Not without reason," somebody answered; and then the voices were drowned in the crash of the band overhead breaking into a Strauss valse, and as there was to be no Imperial Quadrille, the general dancing began at once.

Deodato's thoughts flew back to his private torments, and he

began to edge his way towards the *estrade* of the diplomatic corps, in the hope of attracting the notice of Clementine Waldoz. But her seat was empty, and he presently saw her valsing in the arms of the dashing General Bourbaki. While he stood waiting, a voice accosted him, and turning he saluted General Sertigues, who had greeted him in company with a bluff-looking old man in naval uniform with a collar of grey beard round his throat. Deodato recognised Admiral Jurien de la Gravière, another of the disappointed leaders of the great Mexican dream. The General enquired with a leer why a good-looking young man like Captain Caprano could find no partner among all these fair flowers, and he answered with a short laugh that the floor was too full.

"It is a crowd, indeed," assented General Sertigues; "but they will soon spread themselves. You know, Admiral, they have thrown open the whole palace this evening. Every room, every corridor, every staircase! They have opened a special stair, too, upon the private gardens. All the paths are illuminated, and," he sniggered, "all the arbours agreeably dark. . . . Let us hope no one meets the Red Man to-night!"

"The Red Man?" asked Admiral Jurien with honest concern. "Who is that? Not one of these terrorists, I hope?"

General Sertigues cackled. "Of course not! Hyrvoix has purged Paris of the terrorists long ago. No. The Red Man is the sprite of the Tuileries; don't you know Béranger's song?" He began to sing softly in his cracked voice against the music of the valse:

"Did you never hear
Of the goblin in red,
With his hump and his limp,
And the snake round his head?"

A sort of harbinger of woe, you understand, Admiral? My father, who was in the old Régiment de Lambesc, used to sing it to me. How does it go on?

"With his nose in a hook,
And his cloven hoof,
At whose coming there cracks,
The Tuileries roof. . . ."

"Pray excuse me, General," interrupted Deodato. He had just seen Clementine return to her seat by her husband on the

diplomatic dais. Crossing over, he stopped before her chair and bowed. "*Bonsoir, Mme. la Princesse,*" he said with a smile.

"*Bonsoir,*" answered Clementine with an absent look; then, leaning past Deodato, she waved a greeting to Vaulancourt, who was passing by with another lady on his arm.

Deodato turned crimson. He could not have been more pointedly, more rudely, ignored. Prince Waldoz cocked an eyebrow at him with an air of humorous resignation. "*Voilà de ma Clémentine!*" he murmured, as Deodato strode away through the dancers, scarcely knowing in his anger where he went.

He found himself at length in the Arched Gallery on the further side of the Staircase of Honour, where a refreshment buffet had been set up. There were not many people here yet, but the eternal General Sertigues de Messimy was swallowing ices in a corner at a pace which did credit to a veteran digestion. "Still no partners, Captain Caprano?" he sniggered. "By the way, where is the Duke of Smolensk? He does not seem to be present to-night. Is this rumour true that I hear?"

"What rumour, General?" asked Deodato wearily, accepting a cup of iced coffee from a flunkey.

"That Maximilian of Mexico has sent another messenger, begging our Emperor's help in his dire need; and that, to prevent his emissary arriving in Paris . . . and talking . . . Smolensk has been sent to Saint-Nazaire to head him off as soon as he lands?"

Deodato shrugged his shoulders. "I know nothing, General," he answered, and moved to the buffet to ask for another glass of the iced drink, for he was tormented by a raging thirst.

As he did so he heard voices at the entry to the gallery, and saw Clementine appear on the arm of a wealthy Jewish banker. "I do not care!" she was saying stridently. "I will *not* be taught the figures of a quadrille by that woman! She thinks because she comes from Vienna that no one knows a civilised dance but her. So I told her what I thought, as you heard. She can complain to her husband Prince Metternich if she likes!"

"But if she complains to the Empress, dear lady?" hazarded the Jewish gentleman. "It was all rather loud!"

"The Empress may need lessons from her—I do not. Adieu, M. Rothenstein. I see General Sertigues over there, to whom," she added mendaciously, "I have promised a dance."

As the banker withdrew, bowing low, a savage resolve took

possession of Deodato. As the Princess came sweeping past him, he let the glass he was holding drop as if by accident at her feet.

"*Fichu maladroït !*" she screamed, leaping back and catching up her dress in her tiny fingers. There were drops of the coffee on her slim purple slippers. She wheeled upon the offender with a truly Croatian savagery blazing in her eyes. "You!" she exclaimed, recognising Deodato and letting her skirt slowly fall again. "Then it was *not* an accident!"

"One gets a little tired, Princess," retorted Deodato, "of being ignored. So . . . one does what one can."

"*Mon Dieu !*" murmured the Ambassador, "*que vous êtes mal élevé !*" You keep the odour of your up-bringing, my friend."

Deodato shrugged his shoulders. Despite his fury, a touch of the satyr smiled in his eyes.

"You child!" said Clementine in her deepest guttural. Her mouth began to twitch at the corners, as always under the challenge of impudence. "Do you know you nearly ruined one of Worth's masterpieces? What shall I do to you, François?"

"Give me a dance; that is all I ask. Give me a dance . . . and we will not dance it."

She lifted her diabolique eyebrows as if astounded at his audacity. But all she said was, "Where then?"

"In the garden," he replied. "In the little arbour behind the statue of the chaste huntress Diana."

She gave him a long, veiled look. "Well," she said at length. "I will forego the cotillon for you. Even you will not be so tedious as the cotillon at the Tuileries. They only give five-franc presents."

Deodato, looking round after her departure, discerned General Sertigues de Messimy still in his corner, leering at him as if he had been looking at the pictures of *La Vie Parisienne*. He realised with intense annoyance that the old scandalmonger had been eaves-dropping.

(3)

It was not surprising that Deodato should arrive early at the place he had chosen for the rendezvous. The two hours that had still to elapse before the cotillon concluded the ball were longer than any he had ever lived through, and he felt too tensely strung-up to while away the time by dancing. So he was early out in the garden, glowing softly with its be-jewelment of little red and blue

lamps and its festoons of Venetian lanterns looping up the mysterious masses of the trees and shrubs. All along the façade of the palace golden light streamed from the windows, making a fairy incandescence upon the terrace; and through these illuminated casements valse music floated out upon the night.

The garden seemed nearly empty, for many of the guests were already preparing to go home. Nevertheless Deodato judged it advisable to peep into the secluded arbour he had chosen for his meeting with Clementine Waldoz—after all, some one else might have had the same idea. Accordingly he passed the glimmering shape of the chaste Diana with her quiver on her shoulder, and glanced into the recess of the arbour.

His apprehension had been founded! With irritation he detected in the gloom the paleness of a woman's dress. He was withdrawing with a muttered apology, when the woman rose to her full height and took a step towards him. Deodato recoiled as if pierced by a lance, and a sobbing cry burst from his throat. It had not needed the faint gleam of the fairy-lights round the arbour to make him recognise that figure, that step! "Ludovica!" he gasped, and again, "Ludovica! No, it is not possible!"

She stood very still, regarding him, wrapped in a pale-coloured cloak trimmed with ermine. Round her throat he could discern the sheen of her famous pearls.

"Ludovica!" he babbled. "You in Paris! . . . You here! . . . I had no idea . . . I could not have dreamed . . . I did not see you in the ball-room, or anywhere. . . . What does it mean?"

He could feel her eyes fixed upon him in the gloom with a terrifying intentness. "I only arrived in Paris," she said in her vibrant contralto, "this morning. I did not intend to stay more than a day or two, or to go to this ball. . . . But I came, an hour ago, for you, Deodato."

His heart leapt, though he tried to quell it with resentful suspicion. "You came for me?" he stammered. "I do not understand that either. No, I do not understand it at all." His mind jumped off at a tangent. "How did you know you would find me in this corner at this time?"

"I learnt it from General Sertigues de Messimy," she answered, with the same calmness restraining, Deodato felt, a fierce emotion. "The General," she said, "could not hide from me that you were meeting . . . that woman . . . here!"

Deodato gave a shrug. The General had not behaved like a man of the world. But what did that matter now? . . .

"I was driven!" Ludovica exclaimed, the passion in her voice beginning to burst the dikes of restraint she had set up. "I could do nothing else, Deodato! This afternoon, at tea with the Princesse d'Essling something was said . . . I do not remember by whom . . . and I understood in an instant. . . . I thought it would kill me! Clementine Waldoz! Clementine Waldoz!" She repeated the name with a loathing that seemed to shake her. "I could not bear that! . . . All the time that I had been hiding my suffering alone on the hills by Metz . . . while I had been wandering in the woods of Saulny, wetting them with my tears . . . walking the desolate plain from Gravelotte to Mars-le-Tour . . . ah! how often . . . trying to kill pain with fatigue . . . all that endless time you, here in Paris, were with Clem—" She seemed to choke. "I will not allow it!" she cried in a voice that rang out of the arbour as if she were careless of discovery. "I forbid it, Deodato! I forbid it . . . Ah! *Dio mio!*" she began to sob. "What am I saying? What right have I? . . . But I must speak, for I cannot endure it a moment longer!"

"Hush! Ludovica. Hush!" he pleaded, alarmed lest any passer-by should hear her. Internally he was in a turmoil. Doubt and bitterness struggled vainly with the overmastering joy that was flooding up in him as he realised the meaning of her outburst . . . the depths of the passion it revealed.

"Ah! Deodato!" she sobbed. "How could you? To sink to that creature! How could you be so cruel, so faithless?"

"Faithless!" he could not help interrupting. "But it was you, Ludovica, who deceived me . . . breaking your freely given oath. . . . I had no rights over you, I know. But I loved you . . . how I loved you!"

"And yet you could not trust me! You would not give me an inch of trust. I could have explained—"

"You did not! Admit, Ludovica, you did not! What was I to think then?"

"If you had loved me, you would have believed that I was pure."

"Belief!" he made a gesture of despair, carrying frenzied hands to the two tangles of curls upon his temples and bowing his forehead upon them. Then he lifted his head, listening. He thought he had heard a step.

"She is coming!" wailed Ludovica. "The miserable creature is coming! . . . No! You shall hear me first!" She looked round her wildly. "Come! down this alley—it is dark there! You shall come with me, Deodato!"

She laid her hands upon the cords and tassels of his tunic, seeking to drag him from the spot; and at the feel of those long, square-tipped fingers against his breast, the scent of the golden bands of her hair, now falling in disordered loops from its dressing under the stress of her self-abandonment, a wave of passion broke over him that almost overwhelmed him. It was a Ludovica he had never known who now stood palpitating before him, all her marble melted, the saint and patriot swallowed up in the slave of furious Love. . . . It was a dream that he could not yet credit.

He followed her, unresisting, a little way down the dark alley; then stopped with her, pressed behind a mass of dark-blue foliage against which a marble nymph was outlined.

Both had heard a light, brisk foot crossing over the gravel path towards the arbour they had left. At the same moment the orchestra within the palace with a fine irony broke into the strains of the Galop from "*Orphée aux Enfers*," softened by distance and with the dance adapted, no doubt, to the propriety of the Tuileries cotillon. Crouching breathless, the two could hear Clementine moving restlessly about in the shadows of the arbour. There was a long pause, during which Ludovica could not repress a hissing sigh of impatience, though Deodato pressed her hand for stillness; then the footsteps passed swiftly away again, back towards the palace, with what fury Deodato could picture, and "She is gone . . . gone . . . gone!" Ludovica ejaculated with a savage exultation in her voice. "Out of your life, my Deodato! . . . For now, my beloved, I give myself to you, wholly and for ever . . . if you will take me," she added plaintively in a voice like a little girl's.

Deodato flung every scruple, every suspicion away, as she came, floating like some stately ship in full sail, into his arms. At last the small scarlet lips clung to his mouth! At last his hands pressed the white column of her neck, feeling its contours with the blended passion of a lover and a sculptor! And in their first kiss such a flame swept over him that the night, the gardens, the magically shining façade of the palace all passed away from his consciousness. In one moment all that Paris had done to corrode or embitter his nature dropped away from him, and he became again the youth

with the limpid soul who had bowed in wonder before the altar in San Francesco a Ripa.

Suddenly he was conscious that, with her face still buried in his bosom, the tendrils of her gold hairs still tangled in his silver lace, she was pressing some hard, cold object into his palm. "What is it?" he murmured.

"The key," she whispered, still hiding her face from him. "The key of our conservatory in Avenue Wagram. The garden-door I shall always leave unbolted now."

"Where is your husband then?"

She lifted her head with a gesture of contempt. "Away at Saint-Nazaire . . . some mission . . . I neither know nor care. . . . When you know all about . . . my husband," the words seemed to scorch her lips, "you will understand. But to-night, we will not think of him, Deodato . . . no, nor to-morrow night, my beloved," she murmured with her arms stealing round his neck.

"Alas! it cannot be to-morrow night," he told her. "I am in attendance on the Emperor after the review."

"Then the next night!" She laughed. "I can wait. . . . I am not distrustful, Deodato!"

"Ah! let the past be buried! I wipe it from my memory! Keep your secret, Ludovica, I will not pry. The future . . . is it not so . . . will hold no troubling mysteries? On Wednesday night, then. . . . What about your servants?"

"I have nobody at Avenue Wagram but old Luigi, and Benedetta. I had only meant to come to Paris for a week. The house is closed; my husband, I believe, lives at his club when he is in Paris. Benedetta does not see very well nowadays, and Luigi sees nothing he should not. . . . In any case, they know something of what I have had to endure . . . not all. I dare trust them both."

"So be it. Adieu now; we should return; the ball must be over. Neither of us should attract notice by any unusual conduct at this time."

But he drew her to him for a last kiss; and it seemed that neither could withdraw from that embrace. Each time one made a move to do so the thirst of their passion held them clinging together. When at last they tore themselves apart each murmured to the other, "Wednesday!"

"EN REVENANT DE LA REVUE"

(I)

DEODATO felt once more how idle were his father's fears and forebodings when next morning he stood at his post, again in full dress, in the decorative pavilion that made the Imperial Box in the middle of the grey-towered Grand Stand of Longchamps Racecourse. Already the Empress was present in the midst of her ladies, delicious in a dress of pale-blue silk and a wide hat with curling white plumes; and already upon the sward the regiments were ranked for the review: the infantry in front with bayonets that gleamed bluish in the sun, behind, under the shadow of the trees, the artillery and cavalry in a dim expanse from which now and again a helmet flashed, a sabre or lance-point twinkled. Between the two the bands were massed, a shining forest of brass, with the gigantic Drum-Majors leaning expectantly on their gilt staves.

This was to be one of the grandest military spectacles of the régime; never before had Napoleon III been able to inspect his soldiers with a Tsar on his one hand, a King on the other. He would have something to show them, thought Deodato, playing with his sword-knot. . . .

There was a sudden ripple of command through the waiting battalions; swords glanced through the air, and bayonets rose in lines to the shoulder. Could it be the Emperor and the visiting Sovereigns already? The next minute, while troops presented and eagles dipped in salute, a daumont swept on to the turf, with an escort of scarlet-cloaked Spahis prancing around it in their Oriental saddles, and drew up facing the Imperial pavilion. Out of this carriage stepped briskly the lank figure of General Frossard, in cocked hat and feathers, and two *Officiers d'Ordonnance*, all three standing to the salute on touching the ground.

Then there rose from the back-seat, where his puny form had been almost buried, a small boy, imprisoned, as though by a strait-jacket,

in the white-braided tunic of a Grenadier of the Guard. With a slow and careful step, as if he felt himself under the eye of a master who would not spare to rebuke him for a false movement, the Prince Imperial marched by his splendid attendants and directed himself towards the pavilion in which his mother stood waiting for him. Alone, crossing the empty strip of sward with his stiff, drilled step, he looked, Deodato thought, infinitely pathetic—upon that midget depended all the future of this surrounding pomp, all the hopes and burdens of the Empire, all the wealth of the glorious capital hidden from view behind the trees of Longchamps, all the prosperity of great, toiling France stretching away for leagues on every side of him beneath the burning summer sun!

"A-a-a-h!" There was a murmur of admiration among the Empress's ladies. The Prince, smiling, had clicked his heels together, and, small hand to képi, had given such a dashing salute to his mother before mounting to her side that for the instant his vital boyishness seemed equal to the crushing tasks awaiting him. "How gallant!" cried one feminine voice; "How adorable!" exclaimed another.

But now there came a stir that allowed of no mistake. Up from the road towards Paris ran a wave of cheering that quickly took hold of the huge crowd packed round the parade-ground. The bandsmen raised their mass of glittering brass, the Drum-Majors straightened their staffs in readiness. Then as the cheering swelled louder, and the heads of a starred and feathered cavalcade appeared round the corner of the Grand Stand, a thin cry came from old Marshal Canrobert sitting on horseback with his flowing white locks in command of the parade: "*Garde à vous! . . . Salut Impérial!*"

Instantly the gilt staves leapt into the air; the drums rolled and crashed; and while the immense sheaf of bayonets flashed down to the salute, the familiar lilt of "*Partant pour la Syrie*," suave, melodious, almost a dance-theme made to fit the caracoling of the Imperial staff as it advanced, mingled with the happy sunbeams. In front rode three horsemen, Napoleon, stately and dignified as always in the saddle; to his right the tall Tsar on a black horse; to his left the Prussian King, the snow of his whiskers gleaming under his black-and-gold spiked helmet. Behind jingled the cortège of French Marshals and Generals, the diplomatic attachés, and the attendants on the foreign Sovereigns. Prominent among these were the King of Prussia's two familiars: Bismarck, no longer the Lutheran

clergyman, but a giant cuirassier in white with glistening silver helmet ; Moltke in a lean blue frock, with his spiked helmet seeming to oppress his meagre skull like an extinguisher. But as the Sovereigns rode along the line for inspection, Deodato had enough of military experience to realise that the gaunt Prussian General alone, with eyes like particles of diamond, was examining and weighing the troops before him with a real professional scrutiny. An indignation rose in him. If the Prussian wanted to know . . . well, they were ready to teach him !

Meanwhile the Sovereigns had returned to the saluting-base, and the march-past was commencing. It was led by the regiments of the Imperial Guard, their Drum-Majors strutting like pheasants, their golden eagles crouched to swoop on the tops of the tricolours, the chargers of the mounted officers stepping as delicately as if they had been trained in the *haute-école* ; and, adding an irreclaimably comic-opera touch to the disciplined pomp, the stout forms of the cantinières, dressed in the uniforms of their respective corps, with the addition of laced aprons and ballet skirts of red and blue, their little barrels dancing over their ample hips as they marched.

Wave upon wave passed the Grenadiers in their towering bear-skins, led by the long-bearded and leather-aproned sappers, rank after rank of rugged-cheeked veterans with medalled breasts ; the Voltigeurs with their gilt-bedizened shakoes ; the sombre Chasseurs with their cocks'-feathers ; the Zouaves like a flower-garden in the blaze of their gay fezzes, braided jackets, and baggy, red breeches.

Behind the Guard, battalion endlessly succeeding battalion, followed the Infantry of the Line in the uniformity of dark-blue *capote*, red trousers and twinkling white gaiters. Their march was less orderly than that of the Guard, just as the Guard itself displayed less precision than the rigid corps d'élite of Prussia or of England would have shown at such a parade. But to Deodato their passage was the more impressive for its tumultuousness. It seemed to him as if the soil of France had come to life, to defend itself and the Empire, bristling spontaneously with bayonets, surging like an irresistible ocean. . . . Let Moltke and Bismarck note *that*, and take account of it ! . . . As if to confirm his defiance, with a rumble like distant thunder the artillery trotted by, the muzzles of the guns protruding yawningly between the wheels, the crimson facings of the black-uniformed Guard batteries aglow like smouldering flames.

Infantry and artillery had now marched right off the ground ; but the most stirring spectacle of all had yet to come. Their disappearance had left the cavalry regiments exposed to view at the back against the curtain of leaves. Now trumpets shrilled all along this line with breathless fury ; and at their cry the whole mass rippled, the sabres waved like streaks of lightning down the front, and the horses leapt forward to the charge.

Nearer and nearer they came, the thunder of the thousands of hoofs drowning the frenzied shouts of the spectators ; and, as they approached, the magnificent variety of their uniforms and accoutrements became distinguishable, eclipsing all the grandeurs of the infantry. Here were the light-green coats and tiger-skin helmets of Dragoons, and there Hussars on grey horses flew their pale-blue pelisses. The white tunics of the Guard Lancers shone against the sober olive of the mounted Chasseurs ; while, heading the right of the charge, the resplendent Guides showed a solid bar of gold below their brown busbies. A sea of Cuirassiers of the Line, in red trousers and red worsted epaulettes, sent forth a shimmer of steel ; but these were dulled by the sky-coloured tunics, the snowy breeches and polished jack-boots of the élite Cuirassiers of the Guard. Half thrilled, half amused, Deodato noticed the mounted cantinière of this corps, a tiny, fair-haired girl, galloping her grey Arab mare like a jockey on the flank of the regiment, the plumes of her cavalier hat streaming straight out behind, her pale-blue ballet skirt flapping over her dainty soft leather riding-boots.

Then his artistic eye was possessed by the wonderful frieze of horses, nearly half a mile long, the tossing surf of manes, the glaring eyeballs, the foam-flecks on neck and flank, the rhythmical bending of knees and pulsation of hoofs. It was a piece of animated sculpture that seemed to hurtle through air rather than race over the turf, though it flung behind it a black cloud of dust and clods which threw into still brighter relief its brilliant trappings—and Deodato, whose hand had tightened a moment on his sword-hilt, suddenly found his eyes misty with tears he could not comprehend.

A murmur almost of alarm ran through the stands round the Imperial pavilion as this terrific living projectile swept down, it seemed with uncontrollable force, upon the three monarchs sitting their horses now only a few yards from the oncoming cavalry. Then *Halte!* broke the shrill scream from the squadron-leaders lifting their sabres into the air, and the whole mass jerked to a standstill

within a horse's length, earth and stones spurting up round the planted hoofs, some of the chargers bent back upon their haunches, one or two rearing up in their frenzy. And again Deodato smilingly admired the address of the tiny cantinière of the Guard Cuirassiers, who sat waving her great, plumed hat like a circus-rider, while her grey Arab wheeled and reared by itself on the far edge of the line. . . .

There was a second's thrilled silence before the storm of acclamation and hand-clapping broke. Deodato saw the visiting monarchs congratulating their host, and observed how Bismarck, in a burst of genial laughter, made a sweeping gesture with his gauntleted fist, as though admiringly illustrating the impetus of the charge. . . . But it also seemed to him that the end of this gesture was an almost scornful flick of the fingers . . . like the action of one scattering a handful of grain to the winds. What the devil, he asked himself, did the Prussian mean by that ?

(2)

It was part of Deodato's duty to wait until all the Sovereigns had left the ground. He saw the tall form of the Tsar entering the first carriage, and standing up in his cockaded helmet while Napoleon's less impressive figure took its place with him ; after which the two Emperors exchanged bows and sat down side by side. The Equerry on duty, M. Raimbeaux, superb in green and gold livery and cocked hat, took his place on horseback by the carriage door, Cent-Gardes and Lancers closed round, and the monarchs drove off, the lance-pennons nodding in front, and the feathers of the Tsar's helmet still gleaming above the hood of the daumont behind.

The King of Prussia was to return in a second carriage with the Empress ; but there was considerable delay before they drove off and Deodato was at last free to get his horse and make his way through the Avenues of the Bois towards Paris.

He could not go very fast owing to the crowd ; but when he came near to the cascades his progress was blocked altogether by an excited surging and counter-movement in the throng. People were running backward with faces of dismay, and shouting something which the occupants of carriages and *fiacres* were leaning out to hear. Deodato, reining in to listen, caught the word " Attempt ! " cried by several voices, and then " Assassination ! "

"Who is assassinated?" he cried, with the authority of his uniform, to a passer-by. "In God's name—not the Emperor?"

"No, my Captain," screamed a ragged boy with eyes that glittered savagely in his hungry face. "Not *Badinguet*, this time! It is the Russian Tsar who is dead! Shot! *Vive la Pologne, Monsieur!*"

"The Tsar shot!" ejaculated Deodato, incredulous.

"But no, *Monsieur le Capitaine!*" protested a lady's voice from a victoria. "There is a gentleman here, a friend of mine, just ridden back to warn me, who says the assassin missed his aim."

"Splintered the carriage and wounded the Equerry's horse," explained her friend breathlessly, riding up to Deodato. "It was Raimbeaux, the Equerry, saved both Emperors probably. He saw the assassin, a most determined fellow, preparing to aim, and drove his horse in between him and the carriage. The horse was hit in the nostrils; Raimbeaux escaped by a miracle. . . . There's a decoration for him!"

"Who fired the shot, Monsieur?" demanded Deodato, with a sudden tremor.

"How should I know? The police had trouble to prevent the crowd tearing him to bits. Somebody said he was a Pole . . . that seems reasonable, since he clearly aimed at the Tsar, not our Emperor."

Deodato felt enormous relief. It was a Pole—that was all right! Still he felt he needed more information, and crying, "Make way! I am an officer of the Emperor's!" he pushed his horse through the seething crowd right up to the cascades.

There he saw a large circle of people standing round a riderless horse with rich caparisons, which he took to be that of the Equerry. It did not seem to be in great distress, though shaking its head violently every few moments. A groom with a bucket was trying to examine its wounded nostrils. Deodato looked about for someone to instruct him more fully, and at length detected one of the *Gardiens du Bois*, whom he beckoned to his side. "Did you see the attempt?" he inquired.

"No, my Captain, but I was on the spot a second or two later. *C'est du propre!* The Tsar will have a fine idea of French hospitality! And yet, Monsieur, they say it was not a Frenchman who fired the shots."

"It was a Pole, was it not?" asked Deodato quickly.

"So they say," answered the Guardian, stroking his moustache.

"They hadn't much time to question him, you may imagine! They thrust him into a *fiacre*, and drove him off to the police-station."

"A good thing!" said Deodato, touching his horse with his heel.

"But it would have been still better, Captain," answered the man, looking up at him as he moved off, "if they had taken the other as well!"

Deodato checked his horse. "The other? Who do you mean? What other?"

The Guardian shrugged his shoulders. "I do not know. But several persons said the assassin fired under the arm of another man who acted as a screen for him, to confuse the identification, you understand? . . . And it seems that when the people rushed at the Pole to seize him, one or two were tripped up before they could reach him. . . . I ask myself, Monsieur, what if it should prove to be an international band?"

"Why do you say that?" asked Deodato sharply.

The man shrugged again. "It is only my idea. No one could tell me anything for sure about the other . . . or indeed if there was another at all. . . . Monsieur is going to the palace? . . . *Bonsoir, mon Capitaine!*"

Deodato set off for the Porte Maillot in a state of anxiety which would not be allayed. He told himself he was unreasonable. Not every attempt upon a Sovereign's life necessarily involved the complicity of Piero Santacroce! The principal here seemed to be a Pole; no one had as much as suggested the participation of an Italian. Yet his uneasiness remained, and was illogically but definitely enhanced, when, on slowing his horse to thread his way through the crush of vehicles at the Porte Maillot, he was crossed by the ill-omened figure of M. Dubonnet, bound for the scene of the crime in an open *fiacre*, and urging the driver to haste while a *sergent de ville*, recognising him, waved the incoming traffic out of his way.

Deodato was due to be in attendance on the Emperor at the Tuileries in less than half an hour, and he already risked the unforgivable solecism of being late unless he made almost reckless haste down the crowded Avenue des Champs-Élysées. Arrived in the anteroom of the *Officiers d'Ordonnance*, he found wild gossip raging among his colleagues. They were asserting that the whole of the official parliamentary Opposition was in league with the would-be assassin, whose name was said to be Bérézowski . . . that

Pietri, the Prefect of Police, ought to be dismissed, as he had had three warnings of the attempt and done nothing about it . . . that Bérézowski was an agent of the Prussians . . . of the Italians . . . the head of an immense band of terrorists pledged to slay every Sovereign who came to the Exhibition, and then bomb Paris into ruins for a funeral-pyre !

At the mention of a "band," Deodato, who had been about to leave the room to go to his duties, turned on the threshold and asked, "Why do you speak of a band? Have any accomplices been arrested?"

There was a moment's hesitation, and then the hubbub broke out again. Arrested, no! But they had been seen! . . . Yes, one had certainly been seen; a brigadier of Gendarmerie had said so to the speaker, Captain Avril. And there was an odd thing about it, added this officer. One of the witnesses to the presence of this accomplice was a little girl, who had cried out to her parents, "*Maman*, the naughty man has a wooden hand!" If that was true he should easily be identified.

Deodato stood a moment with perspiration breaking out on his forehead. His suspicions of the first moment had been founded, then! Piero Santacroce *was* in this business! The Pole might be the principal, but Ludovica's brother, the irresponsible, murderous neurasthenic, had helped, at any rate as a shield! Ludovica should be put on her guard at once . . . but how was that to be done? Deodato dared not send a messenger with such a warning from the Tuileries, even under a sealed envelope. He himself was fixed on his feet in the palace till midnight, perhaps until later, if the Emperor chose to sit up. No excuse certainly would avail him for absenting himself during the functions of the evening. His only hope was that, if the Emperor retired early, he might plead a sudden indisposition, and leave the second Officer of the Day to carry out in his place any duties that remained. Then, a quick change out of uniform at the lodging he had occupied in the Rue Castiglione since his new appointment, a *fiacre* to the Arc de Triomphe, and with the key Ludovica had given him he could let himself in by the conservatory and carry his warning. She was not expecting him to-night, but she would hardly be from home. Perhaps Piero had already fled to Avenue Wagram for refuge. If so, the more need for Deodato's aid. It was not the ideal plan, but the only one practicable.

(3)

Actually it was well over midnight when Deodato fitted the key Ludovica had given him into the lock of the conservatory door. He had had to keep a sharp outlook as he made his way round to the back of her house, for it no longer stood amid a brick-littered waste, but in a network of fresh and splendid mansions, and was no longer one of the last residences on the rim of Paris, but a unit in the splendid new Avenue Wagram. He had also been puzzled how he was to effect his entry into the garden, but found that the gate in the wall had already been left unbolted as Ludovica had promised. It was as if he were expected!

Deodato had been kept so late because, although the Emperor, agitated by the unhappy event of the day, had withdrawn early to his cabinet, the word had not come that he was going to bed till some hours afterwards, and before then Deodato did not dare to make his excuses for playing truant. He was thankful the suspense of waiting was over as he fitted the key into the lock of the conservatory door, and found it turn silently and easily. Evidently, it had been well-oiled. Ludovica, he reflected with a thrill, had with eagerness made every preparation for his expected arrival the following night! . . . He thought with some bitterness of the cause that led him thus to anticipate his first visit of love.

Standing in the damp, sub-tropical atmosphere of the conservatory, he could dimly discern through the curtained entry the long salon with its furniture covered in ghostly dust-cloths. At this moment of crossing the threshold of Ludovica's house, with the consciousness thrilling through him that he had entered in this way by the privilege of his new relation to her, it came upon him with fresh force that her sacrifice to Love had been no light one for her to make. However embittered her estrangement from her husband might be—whatever its causes, still largely hidden from him—he knew that for a woman like Ludovica, with her pride and her religion, to descend from the pedestal of married virtue was a fearful step to take. It must have implied a rending of the soul, an urgency of passion, which made her gift of herself one for a lover to accept upon his knees. . . . And he had been willing to believe that she had been carrying on a cynical adultery for years! How should he ever make up to her for that shameful insult?

This thought flitted through his brain, while he stood listening and

wondering how to direct himself in search of her without alarming her servants. He moved cautiously through the swathed furniture of the drawing-room, seeking a door in the gloom. His fingers at last touched a handle; he turned it cautiously, and a crack of light came through from the hall upon which it opened.

He stepped out on tip-toe, surprised to find gas-jets burning, though turned low, at this time of the morning. It must be past two—what did it mean? That Ludovica was still sitting up somewhere, or that her servant had not yet gone up to her attic in the wing? He stood frowning in perplexity and peering this way and that; then started back with a cold shock.

The silence had been broken by a murmur of voices! For a second he was so taken aback that he could not make out where the sounds came from. Then, recovering himself, he realised that it was from the top of the great marble staircase, where a door must be ajar. Straining his ears, he made out the low, grave tones of Ludovica. Then a man's voice replied. . . . Could it be the Duke, unexpectedly back home? Deodato could not restrain a tremor of guilty apprehension. . . . But, no, it was not Smolensk . . . that voice was deeper than his . . . and oddly familiar, though now so muffled and indistinct.

Then, as he realised that the man with whom Ludovica was in converse in the small hours of the one night on which she had been assured that Deodato could not come to her was neither her husband nor her brother, his heart turned to lead. His breath came in trembling pants; his whole body was bathed in perspiration. . . . He remembered the shadow on the blind at Fontainebleau . . . only five minutes ago he had been bitterly blaming himself for his suspicions then!

Loud in the stillness came the creak of the door being opened wider overhead. Swiftly Deodato resolved to see first without being seen. He cast his gaze round the hall, and saw in a shadowy corner a jardinière filled with evergreen plants. Almost before he knew what he was doing he was crouching behind this, invisible from above, while between the stems of the shrubs he had a view right up the staircase, with its purple carpet showing at the edges under a dust-sheet lately disarranged by an ascending footstep. On to the top landing a yellow light streamed from an open door. He could not identify the room. Was it a boudoir . . . Ludovica's dressing-room . . . a bed-chamber?

He huddled down lower. Ludovica had appeared upon the

landing, as if showing her visitor out—Ludovica with her hair tumbled upon her shoulders, dressed in a light silk peignoir, her feet bare and thrust into red Moroccan mules with upturned toes. Deodato glared at the spectacle of her in this apparently amorous disarray like a madman.

Then a shadow fell across her figure, obliterating her from the waist upward, and a man came out of the room, a short man in an evening cape, wearing—odd peculiarity!—his tall hat upon his head! He raised it an inch or two as Ludovica made a deep, willowy curtsy. Then he began to descend the ill-lit stairs with a slow . . . a wavering . . . an all-too-familiar step. Deodato's wits ran about his head like frightened mice; his limbs shook so that he had to steady himself with his fingers on the marble paving.

It was the Emperor—no possible mistake! The Emperor, whose bearded shadow with the longish hair curling on his neck (that detail came back to him now!) he ought to have recognised at Fontainebleau if he had had any sense! . . . The Emperor in plain clothes, apparently quite alone at three o'clock in this house standing secluded in its grounds, from which it was known the husband was absent! Clementine Waldoz's titter rang in Deodato's ears like a devil's sneer . . . and red-hot rage surged through him.

In the middle of the descent Napoleon stopped; turned himself round with deliberation, and glancing up the stairs said in his rumbling voice, "*Faites vite! Faites vite!* Be quick, for the love that binds us together—!" He paused, and added in his silkiest tone, "Be quick, Ludovica!"

At the sound of her name, mumbled with that lover-like intonation by the Emperor, Deodato's self-restraint crumbled. He resolved furiously that as Napoleon passed by his hiding-place, he would leap out upon him and strangle him . . . or fling him down upon the marble of the floor and crack his skull . . . it did not matter which! He did not care in his frenzy for consequences; he had nothing left to live for after this second betrayal. He ground his teeth together; his fingers twitched as he gathered himself for the spring.

Meanwhile, Napoleon came quietly on down the stair, looking straight before him, his eyes dreamy in the glimmer of a gas-globe at the foot of the bannister, and fixed apparently in profound meditation. And as he drew nearer to Deodato's place of ambush, with that imperial calm and look of assured authority, a cold hand seemed to close round Deodato's heart and crush his resolution out

of him. . . . Yes, at a moment when the prestige of the name "Bonaparte" might seem in all reason to be at bankruptcy value in the young man's soul, here in this deserted hall, without uniform, decorations or escort, coming—it leapt to the eye—from the most infamous of rendezvous, Napoleon bore with him on his faltering steps the full power of the imperial legend.

Strike the Emperor! Kill the Emperor! Destroy with one blow of his maddened fist all that his family had ever stood for, all that he had sworn to defend with his blood when he put on the uniform of the Empire, the one life upon which rested the grandeur and the prosperity of France! . . . Deodato's arms fell weakly to his sides. He could not do it. It needed only a step to slay this elderly, ill-looking man, with the vague, benevolent eyes, the bourgeois cape, the tall top-hat set slightly on one side upon the grizzling hair . . . and he was rooted to the pavement. The legend had conquered.

He kept his concealment, watching stupidly while Napoleon fumbled with the catch of the front door, and Ludovica, with the sleeves of her wrap dripping over the marble balustrade above, stood still regarding him.

The door clicked open; and in that moment came a patter of wild footsteps across the hall from a dark patch under the staircase, a shriek from Ludovica, a second, burly form bursting from a side-door, and grappling with the intruder, a stiletto gleaming in the rays from the quivering gas-jets. Deodato ran out from his hiding-place . . . to protect the Emperor . . . and, as he did so, saw Dubonnet twist himself round the half-open front door, and with marvellous alacrity for a man of his bulk, hurl himself into the confused struggle in the middle of the hall. In a minute or two this resolved itself into two men pinning a third down upon the floor, and peering close at his face like beasts of prey worrying a carcase.

"Griscelli!" cried the Emperor. "Put up that weapon of yours! No private executions in this house! I must know who that man is. Why!"—he turned his head sharply at Deodato's approach—"who are you? What are you doing here? . . . A nest of assassins!" he muttered, "what does it mean?"

"Sire," stammered Deodato, "have no fear! I am Captain François Caprano, and I did not come here to harm your Majesty!"

Napoleon stood looking at him and slowly stroking his beard down as if there were no would-be murderer jerking and writhing in the clutches of his bodyguards a few feet away on the floor.

"Captain Caprano?" he drawled. "You are *Officier d'Ordonnance* for the night in the Palace, are you not, Monsieur? Why are you absent from your post, then? However," he gave Deodato a sour look, "that can be explained later. Place yourself there and wait!" He pointed with his familiar walking-stick of rhinoceros hide, topped by a gold eagle's head, to a place upon the paving. "*Garde à vous, Capitaine!*" he rapped, in the tone of command, and Deodato, inured to discipline, stiffened to attention like a sentry.

Napoleon turned leisurely round to the group on his other side. The agents had mastered their man now. He was lying face downwards, his chest heaving, half-stunned by blows from the hilt of the bodyguard's dagger. "Well, Griscelli," asked the Emperor, "who is he? Do you know him?"

The disagreeable flute of Dubonnet replied. "Pardon, sire! I know him. It is Pierre Santacroce, the notorious terrorist. *Le Manchot*, we of the police call him. Your Majesty doubtless remembers—Orsini's fourth man . . . Bérézowski's shield this afternoon, too, we are convinced, though definite proof may be lacking."

The Emperor suffered a little tremor. "Piero Santacroce is dead, surely," he mumbled, "drowned in Rome."

"Excuse me, sire; we have long suspected otherwise. Now we have the proof!"

"He is armed, I suppose?"

Griscelli, with a grunt, held up a revolver he had wrested from Piero's live hand. "All six chambers loaded," he snarled.

"Your brother, Madame!" Napoleon turned his head to Ludovica, where she stood at the foot of the stairs, clinging with one hand to the bronze figure of Mercury on the bottom pillar, which supported a gas-globe on its uplifted arm. "Your brother, waiting to kill me in your house! Be good enough to tell me how this comes to be?"

"Sire," she answered, "I gave my brother refuge here to save him from the police, it is true. After all, it is my flesh and blood! But to assassinate Your Majesty . . . no!—no!—I protest with all my power! . . . I believed he was sleeping fast in the attics, over in the wing there. . . . And I had only a quarter of an hour's warning of your Majesty's arrival by the garden entrance!"

"Don't believe her, sire!" growled Griscelli, Napoleon's Corsican watch-dog with the hard black eyes. He had two or three times saved his master's life from ambushes, and took wide liberties in

consequence. "Don't believe the woman, sir! It was a plot between the two of them! Let me finish with this vermin here," he pulled back his cuff and flourished his stiletto. "It saves enquiry, trial, and," he pointed insolently at Ludovica, "scandal!"

"No, Griscelli, I tell you." Napoleon irritably tapped with his stick on the paving. "I am a constitutional Sovereign to-day. . . . I cannot revive the powers of summary judgment I had in 'fifty-eight; you know it well. This man must stand his trial . . . or be set free." There was a growl of remonstrance from both the police-agents at this, and Napoleon tugged irresolutely at his moustache. "In any case," he said at length, "M. Hyrvoix must conduct an investigation before anything is decided. . . . That will do for the present, Griscelli! Take him to your men outside."

The Corsican had dragged Piero to his feet, and now snapped one bracelet of a pair of handcuffs on his flesh-and-blood wrist, and the other on his own. "So you will not slip away without taking me with you, my lad!" he muttered. "Come! *En route!*"

Streaks of sordid dawn were already penetrating into the forepart of the hall through skylights and the interstices of blinds and curtains. With his dust-smeared face, torn beard and bleeding forehead where it had been scraped over the stone, Piero looked a profane parody of a martyr. His wild eyes flickered for a moment over Deodato, then came to rest on Napoleon. "I was a fool," he croaked in an extenuated voice, "to put myself in the basket for you! I can see now, Louis Napoleon, that a surer hand has found you out and stricken you! *F . . . , Badinguet! F . . . , Badinguet!*" and laughing raucously in spite of Griscelli's buffet across his lips and Ludovica's wail of "Piero! Piero! Have mercy on him, gentlemen!", he was hauled away to the detectives watching the house outside.

For a moment, however, it seemed as though there had been a dagger in his last words. Napoleon stood leaning on the eagle-head of his stick, his face grey and pouched in the sinister light, his hand pressed into the small of his back as if in agony. Then he recovered with an effort, and beckoned Deodato towards him. "Now, Monsieur, explain yourself! What were you here in hiding for?"

With a smothered cry, Ludovica threw herself between them. "Pity, sire! For pity's sake! He is innocent of everything. He came here to-night," she sank down, bowing her noble head, while in the glimmer of the gas-jet held by the Mercury a dark flush of

shame invaded its marble purity like a defiling tide, "for me!" she choked, "by assignation . . . for me!"

Napoleon stood motionless, looking down at her. His great, pre-dacious beak was defined in the shadowy light, and Deodato felt a cold that was more than the dawn chill creep over him, making his teeth chatter. He had never, not even on that first meeting, when he had believed that at any moment he might be whisked off to prison, felt so terrified of the Emperor.

Napoleon straightened himself at last, and something like a sigh came from him. "Since you confess, Madame——" he drawled with searing contempt, and Ludovica shrank away from him, her face in her hands.

The Emperor turned to Deodato, his impenetrable eyes still further veiled as he moved by the dimness that yet hung about the hall. "You will admit, Captain Caprano, that your scandalous conduct, combined with absence from duty, disqualifies you from further service in the Imperial Guard. . . . I need not indicate to you your course. Now go!"

"One moment, sire!" Dubonnet waddled forward from the background in which he had effaced himself during these intimate explanations. "I beg your Majesty to hear me. Truly, your Majesty is too clement. There is more to tell about this gentleman. For sure, he was here to play his part in the attempt upon your life. I do not presume," he sneered, "to doubt the word of *Mme. la Duchesse*. No doubt he expected to be paid for his assistance. But he is an old accomplice of the Santacroce family. On his first arrival in Paris—I can furnish the proof—he aided *le Manchot* to escape from this very house. More than that, I now have his whole history. One of our disguised agents was in the confidence of Pierre Santacroce at a club of anarchists last year at London, in a place called Lasseterre Square. This gentleman, who to-day wears the uniform of her Majesty's Dragoons, is really an apostate friar from a convent in Rome, and from Rome he aided Santacroce to escape in his friar's gown after Orsini's crime. Oh! yes, sire," Dubonnet could not restrain his little giggle, "I have been working hard at M. Caprano's *dossier* for some time! . . . I did not like his taking Santacroce from my hold eight years ago!"

Deodato was appalled at the venom and implacability of the man. He realised bitterly that he had under-rated his old landlord's tenacity.

"Search M. Caprano!" said Napoleon.

Dubonnet hurled himself with exaggerated ferocity upon Deodato, ripped his overcoat from his shoulders, shook and twirled it violently in the air, and then held up a shining object in his hand. "You see, sire?" he shrilled. "Another pistol!"

"It is a lie!" shouted Deodato. "I was unarmed! Why should I carry a pistol in Paris? You planted it there, this very minute . . . rascally *mouchard* that you are!"

Dubonnet wriggled delightedly. "Your Majesty will appreciate that assertion," he tittered. "It is the classic story!"

It was almost full daylight by now. Deodato saw the Emperor regarding him, his face long and fallow, his eyes infinitely withdrawn, as though in distaste at some disagreeable insect. "Take *M. le Capitaine* along as well to M. Hyrvoix," he drawled, passing his fat hand very slowly down the length of his beard. . . . There was a horrible conclusiveness about his gesture, as though he were wiping away that disagreeable insect for ever.

"You need not hold me!" Deodato shook off Dubonnet's snatch at his arm. "I am innocent and I will go with you. You have my parole."

Napoleon, with a discouraged gesture, turned again towards the front-doors. Leaning heavily on his stick, he had his hand on the knob to open one of them, when Ludovica struggled to her feet and rushed across the hall to fall on her knees at his side, seizing the hem of his coat.

"Sire!" she pleaded in a low voice that just came to Deodato's ears. "In spite of what has happened here . . . and it is all a fearful mistake . . . it can all be explained, I swear to you! . . . say that your promise holds good! . . . Tell me that it shall be as you said in my room just now. . . . You will not withdraw your pledge to me, sire, will you?"

Napoleon disengaged her fingers from his coat. "No, Madame," he said sternly. "I no longer trust you. You are doubly perjured! I have changed my mind. It can never be now . . . you understand me? *Jamais! Jamais!*"

She sank down in a heap with a heart-rending moan, and the Emperor, pushing back the door with difficulty, emerged in the morning mist upon the perron of the house beneath the glass canopy. On the steps stood Griscelli, who saluted as he came out. Faintly across the road a small, uncrested coupé could be

discerned. Then the door swung to behind the infirm little figure.

As it jarred into place, sending its echo through the cold, bare hall with its dust-sheeted pictures and statues veiled, as though they were weeping, in the lugubrious light, M. Dubonnet clapped Deodato ironically on the shoulder. "*En avant, mon Capitaine!*" he said. "Breakfast is waiting . . . at Mme. la Roquette's."

"Deodato!" It was Ludovica's voice raised in a piercing cry. "Deodato, don't go! Don't let him take you! . . . Wait a moment, Monsieur, a moment!" she pleaded to the police-spy as she came stumbling towards her lover. "Deodato, listen to me! Don't misjudge me! Have faith in me, even now——"

But as she sank again upon her knees, trying to detain him as she had done the Emperor, he lifted a furious hand and thrust . . . almost struck her away from him. . . . "*Va, gueuse!*" he said between his clenched teeth. "M. Dubonnet, take me away, I pray you, from this brothel!"

(4)

It was about three weeks later that M. Gustave Carpeaux, promising his well-known figure—the picturesque beard and moustaches, the high cheek-bones and deep, melancholy lines running from the nostrils to the mouth—round the quarter of the Pantheon, turned aside from the torrid sunshine baking the Place under the great dome, and on a sudden impulse sought out Deodato's studio in its by-street on the hill-side.

He knocked at the door; there was no answer. He was raising his hand to knock again, when he saw that the door was open, and pushing it back walked in. At the end of the studio he saw a figure sitting in front of a bust draped in damp cloths, its head bowed on its arms. On the floor lay a litter of modelling tools.

"Captain Caprano?" asked the visitor in his brusque voice. The figure started up and faced him, and Carpeaux gave a shocked exclamation. Collarless, haggard, with eyes sunk in purple wells of exhaustion, a beard of several days' growth clouding cheeks and chin round his once neat imperial, Deodato was recognizable to the great portraitist's eye, but might not have been so for a moment to an old friend.

Rough in manner, Carpeaux did not lack tact or gentlemanly instincts. He affected not to notice the shocking disarray of his pupil's looks. "So you are back in Paris again, are you, Captain?" he said. "Someone told me you had been away for a week or two. I was taking my walk this way and thought I would look in on you. I hope I am not disturbing you, or interrupting work?" He smiled genially.

"No, no, *cher Maître!*" answered Deodato in hoarse tones. "How could you disturb me? . . . It is only," he threw out his hands, indicating the disorder of the studio, "it is only that I have allowed things to get into a state here. . . . Truly, the place is not fit to receive you . . . nor am I"; he was about to pass his hand in a shame-faced way over his unshaven chin, but desisted, realizing that it was stained and clotted with clay.

"You have been working too hard," Carpeaux shook a finger at him. "What is the good of that? First too little and then too much? Always the amateur, *mon Capitaine!*"

"You guessed I had been working then?" Deodato turned aside; he seemed oddly moved and relieved that Carpeaux should have put down his condition to that cause.

"*Sacré Dieu!* I should know the signs . . . by now!"

"You are right!" said Deodato with a pathetic eagerness. "It has been work, *Maître!*"; he sighed, "indeed, it has been work! . . . But, what am I thinking of? Pray sit down, Monsieur, and, if you will allow me a few minutes to cleanse my hands . . . and tidy myself a little . . . I shall be all at your service. . . . Believe me, I appreciate the honour of this visit . . . truly I do!"

"Take your time, my friend," said Carpeaux with bluff good nature. "I will sit down here," he smiled indulgently, "on your romantic Oriental divan, and smoke a cigarette till you are ready."

From the sofa he watched Deodato pass with an unsteady step into the tiny lavatory and dressing-room for models adjoining the *atelier*. "What the devil is the matter with him?" he thought, frowning. "I have seen many things, but never in my life an officer of the Guard looking like that—unshaven, sordid! . . . What has happened?" He reflected that though he had his *entrées* at Court, he had not been near Saint-Cloud or the Tuileries for months—otherwise he would surely have heard something about such an odd affair. "*Cherchez la femme!*" he concluded grimly, "though I'm not disposed to take that trouble myself. . . . The boy has

something in his belly all the same . . . pity if he is to be ruined by debauchery."

Presently, as Deodato delayed his return, he got off the sofa and began to wander round the studio, looking at the specimens of his pupil's work.

Meanwhile Deodato, in the minute ante-room, was struggling to pull himself together. He poured out water from a jug to dash it over his throbbing temples; looked round for a clothes-brush; and then had recourse to his outdoor coat, hanging on a peg, for a flask of brandy with which he had been sustaining himself this last twenty-four hours. Carpeaux had heard he had "been away for a week or two"! He gave a chuckle that nearly ended in hysteria. If Carpeaux knew where he had really been this fortnight! . . .

Twelve days . . . twelve months . . . twelve years . . . twelve centuries, shut up *au secret* in the prison of la Roquette; hard pallet, miserable food—deliberately inflicted to break down his resistance. Not a word with a soul but the pitiless M. Hyrvoix in his bleak cabinet, trying to make him convict himself; hours of questioning, during which he had to combat the multiplying lies of Dubonnet, without counsel, without friends, forbidden even to communicate with his father—though indeed he was thankful Orlando was spared knowledge of this horror and scandal. . . . Well, if he had not been toughened by his vagabond life in England he might have broken down, and admitted anything. But he had not, and each day he had marked Hyrvoix's looks getting blacker, his voice more exasperated, and wondered what would come next . . . Torture?

Then, after these æons, one morning the door of his cell had rattled open, and the Governor of the prison, standing on the threshold, had informed him curtly that he was free, and that he was commanded to go to Saint-Cloud that evening in civil clothes to wait upon the Emperor.

"Then my innocence is admitted?" he cried.

"I have nothing to say on that point," retorted the Governor. "So far as I am concerned, the screw is lifted, and that is all."

That evening at Saint-Cloud Deodato was ushered into the famous tapestry-room, usually occupied by the Empress, where the pallid faces of Marie Antoinette, of the Dauphin and the unhappy Princesse de Lamballe looked down from the walls. Napoleon was sitting in a soft arm-chair, meditatively twisting his moustache.

Deodato made his three bows of etiquette, and was surprised to be addressed in a relatively gentle voice. "M. Caprano," said the Emperor, "we have found that a certain injustice has been done you . . . a *certain* injustice," he underlined, "for I am far from considering you blameless in this business. You may thank her Majesty," he continued, "in the first place for the discovery that has been made. With her usual clemency, and moved by a special pity for an officer of her own Dragoons in disgrace, she insisted on the most painstaking investigation being made into the charges against you. Naturally," added Napoleon in a silky voice, lighting a cigarette, "her Majesty was not informed of the details, or of the precise circumstances in which I came so near to losing my life. It would have been useless to distress and alarm her with the full story. But it was enough for her that an officer in whom she had graciously been pleased to take an interest was in a sore plight. She begged me to consider every circumstance in your favour."

Deodato could not help a cynical feeling at hearing how the full truth had been kept from the Empress, but he dutifully inclined his head.

"Therefore," pursued Napoleon, "I made a personal investigation into the charges made against you by the agent Dubonnet. The result was proof that the pistol produced by Dubonnet from your pocket was of a type used by the police," he sleeked his moustache; "and ultimately by its number we were able to find that it had been served out to Dubonnet himself."

Deodato drew a deep breath of relief. Once again, it seemed "M. Charles" had shown himself a good detective! Thanks to the Empress, however! What a good angel she had shown herself! Why was she not here for him to try to thank her? . . . She was not here, because she must continue to be in ignorance where and how her husband had been so nearly trapped. What infamy!

"Dubonnet has been dismissed from the police," concluded Napoleon, "and I acquit you, M. Caprano, of any part in the attempt upon my life in Avenue Wagram."

"With all my heart, I thank your Majesty," Deodato had answered, and indeed had felt as if a stone had been rolled off it. . . .

"Unfortunately," the Emperor resumed, "the matter cannot close there. You are not blameless, M. Caprano. It is proved, not on the evidence of Dubonnet alone, that you assisted this Piero Santacroce to escape the police some years ago. On the night of

his last criminal attempt you neglected your military duty at the Palace to steal to the house of the Duchess of Smolensk on an infamous errand . . . nothing less than an attempt upon the honour of an officer and a gentleman, her husband, whom I hold in the highest esteem."

For a moment Deodato's brain went round. What! must he receive a moral homily from the imperial adulterer he had discovered in the Duchess's room at three in the morning? Did absolute power, then, avail also to make black white?

"For Santacroce," said the Emperor, blowing smoke through his nostrils, "who is the subject of a Foreign Power, I have been content with ordering his deportation in perpetuity from France and her possessions overseas. To you," he drawled, drawing his hand down over his beard, "I think I am showing great lenience if I permit you to resign your commission in my Guard, as of your own free will. . . . It is a condition of this clemency, you will understand, that you give me your parole never to reveal to anyone the true circumstances of your resignation. There are reasons of State."

Reasons of State! . . . Deodato had felt a sick disgust. . . . But what did it matter? He was evidently cast out from grace for ever . . . for a reason more galling to Napoleon's pride than any political delinquency. Why protest? Why not get it all over as quickly as possible? He gave his parole in a sentence.

"It is well," said Napoleon. "I am sorry, M. Caprano, for what has happened. I always flatter myself I know men . . . and I do not expect great things from them. But from you I had expected less flagrant ingratitude . . . from your father's son I had looked for loyalty."

"Sire," answered Deodato, "I beg your leave to speak a word—the right of the condemned! You have condemned me to-day, and it would be useless for me to defend myself. But the time may come when you will have need of every soldier you can arm in France." He glanced up at the figures of abandoned royalty upon the tapestries. "Yes, sire, believe a ruined man when he tells you that there comes an hour to many Sovereigns when every faithful friend is precious. May it be spared you . . . above all, may it be spared her Majesty! . . . But if it comes, then, in that hour, if I am living, I shall claim my place . . . oh! a quite humble one . . . in the ranks of your army again."

Napoleon gave him a long, melancholy look ; but, " You may go, Monsieur Caprano," was all he said.

" *Vive l'Empereur !* " Deodato had answered, saluting.

From that final dismissal he had fled, shunning his elegant rooms in the Rue Castiglione, to the refuge of the *atelier* on the Left Bank. He had not a friend to whom he cared to confide his disaster, and to spare his father, whose weakness seemed to grow on him day by day, he simply sent him a letter speaking of leave of absence from Paris on grounds of indisposition. Alone in the dingy quarter where his studio was placed, he felt the idea of suicide pressing on him with a vividness it had never done at the time of his first disappointment, when Clementine Waldoz had volunteered to cure him. If after several days he had been saved from that black allurements, he could point to no loftier instrument of salvation than—a lump of clay.

Just a lump of clay that he had seen lying on the modelling-stand in the middle of the room when the dawn came in after a night of wakefulness and evil dreams passed on his divan. To still the perpetual torment of his thoughts, he had damped it, set it on the bust-peg, and begun to work it in his fingers—hesitatingly at first, and then with a clearer idea of a head, a face . . . a face that, as he brooded over it, began to receive his thoughts and his pain, draining them away from his own overtaken soul, drawing them, it seemed, into itself through the tips of his fingers.

As it took shape and lineament it began to assume a personality of its own, to possess and dominate him. If for forty-eight hours now he had neglected food, fallen, without noticing it, into unkempt slovenliness, slept only in snatches of stupefying fatigue, usually in front of his work, it was because of this fever and this transport. Dimly he apprehended while he toiled that he was fighting for his sanity ; that expression of his woe alone could heal it. But these considerations hung only on the fringe of his mind ; his whole effort and being were concentrated on the task, the creation of the head to which already his imagination was giving the title Melancholy. . . .

When at last after his confused delay, Deodato re-entered the studio murmuring apologies to his master, he found with a little tremor that it was at the unfinished Melancholy that Carpeaux

was staring, having unwound the damp cloth that Deodato had wrapped round it during his brief slumber.

"Who did this, Captain?" he asked slowly, as Deodato came in. "I seem to detect your hand, but I cannot believe it was you."

"It was me," Deodato told him.

"*Pas possible!*" murmured the sculptor. "Who was your model?" he demanded.

"My model? She was here." Deodato tapped his forehead with a faint smile.

"I feared so. How many times have I told you the living model must make the basis for imagination? This head does not join the neck . . . there is no bone in that nose . . . putty, you know!"

"I fear it, *Maitre*," admitted Deodato.

"Why do it then? . . . But I will tell you something else, now that I have scolded you, *mon Capitaine*. This head . . . Melancholy, is it not? . . . yes, I divined it . . . well, this head astounds me. I knew you had something in your belly, but not anything like this! . . . A touch of pastiche, no doubt . . . those snakes in the hair become a mannerism of yours, and they belong to Canova. Nevertheless . . . the life, the spirit, *c'est épatant, mon ami!* . . . But what is the matter, are you ill?"

Deodato with knees like water had collapsed upon the divan. Down his haggard face tears were helplessly coursing. He could only mutter brokenly, "*Merci, Maitre, merci.*"

Carpeaux frowned at him with his shaggy eyebrows. "How long did this take you?"

"I do not know," murmured Deodato. "I began Tuesday morning. . . . I have only stopped for little snatches since . . . a morsel of bread . . . a sip of cognac . . . an hour or two's sleep when I could no longer see truly by lamplight."

"All wrong! You are a madman, Captain!"

"It has saved me from becoming a madman, *Maitre!* And I am no longer 'Captain'!"

Carpeaux gave him a piercing look; then turned his head again towards the weirdly tragic face in the sad, grey clay. "So it's like that, is it?" he said softly. "Well, *mon garçon*, you can tell yourself already that your suffering . . . I do not enquire its cause; it's not my affair . . . has made an artist out of the amateur. . . . So far I have treated you as an amateur; now, if you choose, I will start teaching you in earnest."

Deodato looked up wistfully. "You believe in me . . . really?" He made a despairing gesture. "But, now I have left the army, I do not know if I can bear to stay in Paris."

"Not in this dingy hole in a noisy street, I can well imagine! Find somewhere peaceful, airy. . . . What in the devil's name brought you here?"

"The view of Paris from the garden."

"Well, go to Montmartre; you will have twice the view there. Listen! I was on the Butte yesterday; the Château des Zéphirs is untenanted again. Take that; the rent should not defeat you! You belong to the gilded youth, *que diable!*"

Deodato looked up hesitant. "Perhaps," he said, "perhaps. The Château des Zéphirs . . . there is peace there . . . one might forget . . . and work!"

Carpeaux stayed chatting with him and smoking cigarettes till the first evening shadows began to lengthen across the sooty little strip of garden. His kindly aim was to distract his pupil from his griefs and his tension of overwork; but a scrap of gossip that he mentioned was unhappily chosen for this end.

"I," he remarked, "as you know, never go to the Palace these days. . . . Court life is a great waste of an artist's hours . . . but I heard a strange piece of news a few days ago from a friend who is one of the Chamberlains. They say the Duke of Smolensk is ruined."

Deodato gave a shuddering start; but he was seated in a corner of the room already twilit, and Carpeaux failed to observe his emotion.

"Yes," continued the artist, lazily puffing smoke into the air as he leaned back on the cushions of the divan, "they say that Mexico has finished his fortune. He made insane investments trusting in an Imperial victory; now they are all . . . smoke." He waved his hand to scatter the whorls from before his eyes. "And the worst is, according to my friend the Chamberlain, that for reasons no one at the Tuileries can comprehend he has suddenly at the same time lost the support of the Emperor. He had dreamed of becoming Commandant of the Imperial Guard, as a step to the Ministry of War, but that, which would have kept his creditors quiet, has all fallen through now, it seems. He has resigned his position as Aide-de-Camp, and is returning with his wife to his old command at

Metz. . . . How fickle are the favours of Sovereigns, and how stupid for artists to intrigue for them! Anyhow it is a complete *crach*. Did you hear anything about it?"

Deodato shook his head with an inarticulate murmur, and, shortly after, Carpeaux took his leave. After his departure Deodato wandered out into his little garden, his temple throbbing, his soul wrung again. . . . Little had Carpeaux suspected that he could supply the key to the story of the Smolensks' disgrace. With his feline ruthlessness when exasperated or alarmed, Napoleon had evidently decided to be rid both of the discarded mistress and her husband. He would never take the risk of finding *le Manchot* waiting for him a third time with pistol or bomb. . . . The Duke of Smolensk might henceforth keep guard over his dangerous wife in the safe remoteness of a frontier province. . . . And so the sordid catastrophe unrolled its consequences.

Deodato sighed, and looked across to Montmartre, with its wind-mills making little black crosses against the tranquil evening sky. Perhaps he, too, would seek tranquillity there. The Château des Zéphirs! . . . It was an alluring hermitage.

He was sitting in the belvedere plunged in these mournful speculations, when he was surprised to see a head rise cautiously over the wall at the foot of his garden, where an alley ran separating it from the yards of the next row of houses. Moreover the head was the head of Dubonnet, the ex-police spy! It disappeared as Deodato sprang up and peered through the window of the belvedere, and he began to think he was getting hallucinations from his brooding. It had been some tramp or beggar surely . . . he must be finished with Dubonnet!

After some minutes waiting and not seeing the head again, he remembered that the front-door to the *atelier* was open, and with a sudden uneasiness returned to the house to secure it. As he entered from the window into the garden, he heard a rapid step coming down the passage from the front-door, and a man burst into the studio. The last daylight from the window fell upon his face, and Deodato staggered back with an exclamation of dismay. It was Smolensk!

"I see," said the Duke, who was holding one hand behind his back, "that you know what I have come for. No need for words between us two, eh?"

Deodato stiffened himself. "There is every need for an

explanation, *M. le Duc*," he said, "since you have forced my door without knocking!"

The Duke gave a sharp bark of laughter. "That is good! And how often have you crept into my house when I was absent, under the shadow of the night, *M. Caprano*?"

"Send your seconds to me, if you think you have a grievance, *Monsieur*," answered Deodato defiantly, "but leave me now."

"Seconds to you, a cashiered officer? One does not fight rats, one exterminates them!"

His hand flashed up from behind his back; Deodato instinctively sprang sideways to avoid the shot, and fell with a red-hot pain in the bones of his shoulder.

"Honour at least is saved!" he heard the Duke say, as if to himself, before he swooned away.

In the Rue Soufflot running down from the Pantheon, a newspaper-seller was passing along the line of the cafés, chanting lugubriously, "Death of the Emperor of Mexico! . . . Shot at dawn! . . . Death of the Emperor of Mexico!"

END OF BOOK THREE



BOOK IV

The Stricken Eagles

“ Allons, enfants de la patrie ! ”
The Marseillaise.

CHAPTER ONE
GRAVELOTTE

(1)

THE Duke of Smolensk's pistol-shot, breaking two bones in his shoulder, was still giving Deodato twinges on a morning of August three years later.

By the luck of a doctor happening to be passing and hearing the shot fired in the studio, his wound had been attended to before he lost much blood ; but the subsequent setting of the shattered bones had not been very skilful, and he was left with a permanent weakness of that arm and shoulder, which turned to pain if he exerted them too much, or exposed them to dampness. Smolensk, he believed, must have left the *atelier* by the garden after his reckless act of vengeance on the man Dubonnet had denounced to him as the author of his dishonour. (Dubonnet had kept to the end his habit of paying accounts in full.) The Duke must afterwards have been glad, Deodato supposed, that he had not committed murder in that savage moment when, like a wild beast at bay, he had believed himself totally ruined. For somehow his affairs seemed to have been re-established ; there was no public scandal ; and he continued to live with his wife, holding an administrative post in the Military Division of Metz.

Not that Deodato had pursued enquiry far into the fate of the Smolensks. No : the recluse artist of the Château des Zéphirs on Montmartre, whose works in 1868, in 1869 and, quite recently, in the spring of this year 1870, had attracted growing notice from the critics at the Salon, had tried with all his power of will to keep that page in the volume of his life turned down. It was finished ! He desired to live now wholly for his sculpture ; and since his father's death he had made few friends, apart from his master Carpeaux and a few other followers of his art.

He had been thankful that his father had never learned of his disgrace and dismissal from the Guard. But the old man had died

in the August of that disastrous year 1867, and had believed until he died that his son was only on long leave. It had been kinder so to delude his last weeks—though it had not given him a peaceful death. For during his last hours in his great bed surrounded by military symbols at Cythère, he seemed to be obsessed again by those visions of defeat of which he had told Deodato. He fought over and over again in his wanderings the campaign of Waterloo; and his last words heard by his son had been “Moscow! . . . Leipzig!” Odd how those names had haunted him!

His passing had meant riches for his “nephew,” in addition to the splendid inheritance of Cythère; but these things had not altered Deodato’s life. He had continued his retired existence on semi-rural Montmartre, absorbed in the problems of his art and in them alone. . . . Nevertheless a greater force had intervened to snatch him after all from his retreat; and here, in the early dawn of August 16th, 1870, he was sitting on horseback, in the uniform of a private of the 13th Chasseurs à Cheval, in the main street of the village of Gravelotte on the upland above Metz.

At any time these last three years he must have said, if he had been asked, that this War must come. The trial of strength between Prussia, with the associated German States, and the French Empire, could not be endlessly postponed. Therefore, Deodato had troubled himself little over the *casus belli*, the candidature of a Prussian prince to the throne of Spain with its threat to French security, and the confusion of diplomatic challenges which had followed between Prussia and France and produced the explosion. He had only been concerned to find a place at once in the fighting ranks of the Empire, and his single worry had been lest his arm and shoulder should prove too weak for sabre-drill.

So far, during the month he had been back with the colours, they had held good, though tweaking him during wet marches or dewy nights under canvas. So “Private Caprano,” entered on the roll as *engagé volontaire*, was still a Chasseur, dressed in conical busby, blue tunic, and red trousers with clumsy leather *basanes* stitched to the lower half of the legs—how *le Soldat Caprano* missed his dandified officer’s riding-boots! In the company of the rank and file, who were for the most part depressed but dutiful peasant-lads drawn by the conscription, with one or two unruly and critical Parisian *rapins* among them, he had had to re-learn military duty from a new angle—that of the terrible Sergeant Lablache, with his

searing tongue and constant, exasperated whine, "*Qui m'a fait un pareil soldat ?*", politely rendered, "Who the h—— sent me such a soldier?" He also discovered what the feet of private soldiers smelt like when they took their boots off on campaign. It was all a revelation to the former fashionable Guard officer.

In the camp at Châlons under the pitiless rain they had heard and experienced something of the disorganisation undergone by the French Army while mobilising—tales of reservists living in the Rhine departments who had had to travel to a depot in Algiers for their equipment and return to Strasbourg to join their regiment; of Generals wandering about looking for their Divisions; of units telegraphing wildly from Metz for cartridges, biscuit, "everything." Muddle there had been certainly, belying the jaunty boasts of preparedness uttered by the Minister of War and Chief of Staff, Marshal Lebœuf—and he had paid for it by relegation to the command of a single Army Corps! But the shortage had been exaggerated; at the present moment the station and the sidings at Metz were obstructed with supplies.

The moral of the men, too, whatever was said, was good. Only the untrained territorials from Paris, the Garde Mobile, had behaved badly in camp at Châlons and shouted insults at the glorious veteran, Marshal Canrobert. The Army could do without them, thought Deodato, who had not been unduly depressed, either, by the news of early defeats. Mac-Mahon had been badly beaten at Wörth, and Deodato's old acquaintance Frossard at Forbach. Territory had been lost in consequence—but what of it? It was the fortune of war; and here they were, the bulk of the Army of the Rhine, intact, placed now under the supreme command of Marshal Bazaine, who had the chance at last of showing his reputed brilliancy and saving France!

Here they were, grouped on the great plateau overhanging Metz to the west. Behind them on the plain the old Roman frontier city, inured to centuries of warfare, lay crouched in its girdle of walls and gates amid its twin-rivers and their tributaries. Metz, with its lace-work cathedral spire, its green-crowned islets and esplanade, the immense yellow cubes of its barracks, its squares filled with bronze statues of famous French warriors, its huddled, secretive streets, and dark stone bridges. Metz, the jewel of ancient Austrasia, tranquil as a collegiate town with its secluded courtyards, gardens and waterways; strident as a fortress with drums and bugles;

meditative as a cloister with the chimes from its garland of medieval churches ; imprinted on the sculptured fronts of its palaces of war and administration with the undying kiss of Renaissance Italy—they had left this treasure in the care of its garrison behind them !

Yes : they were in retreat. But it was sound strategy, this withdrawal from Metz and projected march across the bare, rolling plateau to Verdun, whence eventually they would join hands with Mac-Mahon's reconstituted army, now recovering at Chalons, and face the Prussians in full strength for a decisive battle. . . . No doubt the first stages of the retirement had disclosed bad staff-work. The whole force of 170,000 men, four Army Corps and the Guard, with their guns and transport, had been plunged into the bottle-neck of a single road, leading out of the city to the west through a straggling suburb squeezed between the Moselle and the precipitous, vine-clad hills bearing on their summits the forts of Plappeville and Saint-Quentin. What a chaos it had been, that march-out, begun on the afternoon of the 14th ; delayed by an attack from the advancing German armies at Borny on the further side of Metz ; resumed through the night of the 14th and all yesterday beneath the stifling heat of a metallic August sky ! Deodato thought he would never forget what it had been like under the archway of the Porte de France, emerging from the city. The Gendarmerie of the Army, who should have policed the march, were nowhere to be found ; and the tunnel of the Gate was a trampling, jolting, shouting twilight, with the barrels of the chassepot rifles of the infantry glinting, and the white, angry eyeballs of their bearers turned up in protest against the artillery, as it thundered through the middle of the way and threatened to crush the marching feet, Glancing back Deodato had seen cuirassier helmets gleaming dully, and a fresh trampling of horses alarmed by the echoes of the Gate had spread further confusion and fear.

Outside, the road leading through the suburb of Longeville, and then winding up past the red-tiled roofs of Moulins, Jussy and Rozerieulles to the village of Gravelotte on the edge of the plateau, presented an even worse jam of mingled Army Corps and inextricably entangled regiments, all coated alike in the choking grey dust that hung like a cloud over the crawling caterpillar of the march. At one point, a convoy of hay-carts obstructed a battery of mitrailleuses, the newly invented square-muzzled machine-guns on which such high French hopes were set. At another a flood of

Zouaves, looking like marauders with the spoils of robbed hen-roosts dangling at their sashes, swirled round green-liveried out-riders of the Emperor's personal escort. Stately Grenadiers of the Guard in their splendid, white-braided tunics (oddly truncated, however, by the little horned forage-caps they wore in place of their bearskins) rubbed shoulders with short, stocky Linesmen in untidy képis and red trousers; Hussars and Lancers sought to pass in single file along the edges of the road; scarlet-faced staff-officers gesticulated and bawled in vain; exhausted or sun-stricken men lay like spilt beads in the dry ditches; and, towering above everything, a train of colossal waggons bore painfully up towards the summit of the scrub-grown slopes the pontoon-barges that should have been bridging the river below, to expedite the crossing of the troops. . . . In spite of all that here they were, or most of them, grouped round Gravelotte, the remainder still making their way up by the road or across the hills, ready for the next move in the strategic retreat. . . . What was more the 3rd and 4th Corps had given the enemy a good drubbing at Borny before turning to resume their march across Metz.

(2)

Deodato's personal experiences had been bewildering enough since the troop-train carrying the draft in which he had been included had clanked into Metz at dawn on the 13th—the last to get through, since the German cavalry worked round and cut the line from Châlons that day. Nobody seemed able to tell the Chasseurs where their regiment, the Thirteenth, was encamped; and from morning till nightfall they had trailed with empty stomachs on exhausted horses through the encumbered streets of Metz from one end of the city to the other and back again; and then out into the surrounding hamlets, accumulating a string of lamed and saddle-sore chargers, and several cases of sun-stroke among the men. They might, indeed, have been wandering still, if on a country road near Montigny they had not been met by a landau in which sat two officers both of whom Deodato recognised with embarrassment. One was Stanislas Delangle, whom in earlier days he had known pretty well as a Captain in the Guides, a tall, fair-haired, efficient fellow with a monocle, now wearing a staff-officer's black-braided

tunic with a Lieutenant-Colonel's stars on his sleeve. The other was even more familiar, and Deodato was astounded to find him here. Bent and withered, wearing gold spectacles under a new, richly-laced képi, wrapped in a furred coat in spite of the sultry heat, it could be, it was, none other than the immortal General Sertigues de Messimy, whose years by now Deodato would not have dared to calculate!

But this was only the beginning of amazement. Delangle hailed the Lieutenant in charge of the detachment of Chasseurs, and presently the news filtered through to the men that their regiment had been posted to a Division of the General Cavalry Reserve, now in camp at Montigny, and . . . Deodato simply refused to believe his ears . . . that this Division was commanded by General Sertigues de Messimy, with Colonel Delangle as his Chief of Staff!

Deodato sat in his saddle gaping in the sunlight at the venerable mummy reclining shrunken among the carriage cushions. Certainly at a moment when even the ancient General Changarnier, Louis Napoleon's implacable enemy in the days of the far-away Republic, had come forward to serve France under his former rival, some place at desk or depot might have been found for General Sertigues! But, commander of a Cavalry Division! Had he been on a horse for years?

It was perhaps imprudent of Private Caprano to stare so hard at his commanding officer, especially as his file was drawn up close to the carriage-wheels. For the General was returning his gaze, shading his filmy eyes with his hand, and presently he gave a little start, and spoke to Delangle, who called to Sergeant Lablache, who barked at Caprano to leave the ranks and speak to the General.

It was useless for Deodato to deny his identity, and there was something touching in the old man's distress at finding an ex-officer of good family in the ranks. Delangle seemed less sympathetic. Fixing a monacle in his pebble-hard blue eye, he said, "What was the true reason for your leaving the service, Caprano?"

"Family reasons, my Colonel," said Deodato formally. "I sent in my papers and they were accepted."

"So you were not cashiered?" quavered Sertigues.

"Certainly not, my General."

"And you came back as an *engagé volontaire*?" asked Delangle. "Good! I wish some others had done as much. I apologise to you, Caprano. . . . You can rejoin the ranks."

"But we cannot leave him in the troop, you know, Delangle," protested the General. "His family belongs to the original *noblesse* of the Empire . . . as mine does." (Delangle turned away his head, and bit his lip.) "I have it!" exclaimed Sertigues. "I have not yet appointed a *porte-fanion*! M. Caprano shall have the post. You hear, Caprano? You shall carry the head-quarters flag behind me . . . and that will bring you into places where honour is to be won. . . . After all, Delangle," he had added, noticing his Chief of Staff's shrug, "I knew the Count his uncle very well! . . ."

Thus it had come about that this morning Deodato was holding the *fanion*, next to the Trumpeter Duroc, with the escort ranked behind them, and General Sertigues de Messimy just dismounted from his carriage outside the house in the village street where the Emperor had passed the night. . . . They had formed an odd procession forcing their way through the throng on the road from Metz the afternoon before. First the escort with their carbines unslung and ready; then the Aide-de-Camp, Captain Levassier-Verlin, a taciturn, tufted youth from the Faubourg Saint-Germain, on horseback preceding the General's landau with its cockaded coachman and footman; then the General, with Delangle by his side gnawing his fair moustache with irritation at having to go to war in a carriage; then a wagonette with the General's valet, cook, maître d'hôtel and pantryman; then the remainder of the escort, apparently guarding a mysterious closed van which was General Sertigues' main preoccupation all the time . . . and the disappearance of which in the turmoil at the village of Moulins had left him inconsolable, and gradually denuding his cortège by sending man after man back in quest of it.

His Division had by now got well ahead of him, pursuing instructions to advance and reconnoitre the plateau. As the escort passed in the late afternoon through Gravelotte and out upon the Verdun road they had seen the long lines of blue and red, with the sunset flashing on cuirasses and sabre-points, spread fanwise over the gently billowing expanse. It was an alternation of pale greens and browns, dotted with sheaves of corn ungathered in the flight of the peasantry into Metz, though here and there a country cart and a few labourers valiantly pursued their occupation.

Through the midst of this tranquil solitude the poplar-lined road

ran straight for Verdun, rising and falling in switchback slopes to meet the folds and tiny valleys that seamed the apparent smoothness of the surrounding unhedged fields. Along it was strung the rosary of tiny villages whose names as this day's sun sank in a sheet of gold were still unknown to anyone in the world but the local inhabitants—Gravelotte, behind, with its cross-roads and tall, pointing spire, a landmark to the district; Rezonville now coming into view before them, uplifting a square steeple with a clock; Vionville nestling ahead with a dome to its church; the distant roofs of Mars-la-Tour masked by trees at a slight elbow in the road. Each as they passed through it showed the same street of pale-yellow plaster houses and red roofs, the same great arched entries to barns and farmyards; each was shuttered and deserted, at Rezonville only a priest in black cassock and biretta watched the soldiers go by, at Vionville a grandmother in a white bonnet still knitted imperturbably at her cottage-door.

While they drove Delangle kept scanning with his field-glasses the country to the left of the highway. Here the ground sloped down towards Ars and Gorze, and was screened a couple of miles away by a thick curtain of woods, which enclosed it with the definiteness of some vast tattoo-ground prepared for a military spectacle.

Duroc the trumpeter nudged Deodato with his elbow. "*They're in those woods!*" he murmured. "*You'll see if I'm wrong! They always hide in woods, the Prussians! Every foot of them conceals a rifle at this moment! They're not behind us; they're on our flank there, waiting for us. We ought to be more careful, else they'll rush out and capture the old man. . . . Ça serait du propre!*"

"Delangle!" cried General Sertigues sharply. "Listen, quick! I have an idea! . . . My van—what if it went to Rozerieulles instead of Gravelotte, taking the wrong turn at Moulins? It's possible, you know."

By the time they reached Vionville the silent woods and fields were turning grey; through the falling dew the distant trumpets of the reconnaissance blew the retreat like elfin horns. "Come!" said General Sertigues. "There are no enemy round here. Let's get back to Gravelotte, Levassier!" he called to his aide-de-camp, "I don't want any of those infantry Generals to eat the dinner I ordered at the Cheval d'Or."

(3)

"*Garde à vous !*" As the command ran down the Imperial escort drawn up in the main street of Gravelotte, sabres shivered against the early sunbeams, lance-pennons fluttered to attention, the detachment of Grenadiers presented with the swagger of the Guard. The Emperor was coming out.

Deodato awaited his appearance with a pain at his heart. He understood Napoleon's plight. On him fell the responsibility and the blame for everything—the faulty mobilisation, the muddle of supply, the want of a plan of campaign, the initial defeats. He was coming out now to a virtual abdication, to hand over the Army to Bazaine as Generalissimo, while he himself drove off with his attendants to Verdun ahead of the troops. He appeared on the threshold of the little house where he had lodged. Leaning on his stick, a civilian overcoat thrown over his uniform, his straggling grey hair escaping from under his resplendent képi, his face furrowed with pain and illness, he was a sight to rouse pity from his enemies. By his side walked the Prince Imperial in his brand-new Second Lieutenant's tunic, his eyes red, his head thrown back, his fists clenched in a schoolboy's challenge to misfortune ; behind lurked Prince Napoleon, sporting now with a hang-dog air the snowy breeches and high boots he had put on at the start of the campaign in imitation of the first great Emperor's battle-dress.

At the sight of his old benefactor so reduced by sickness and prostrated by misfortune, Deodato's last sparks of resentment vanished, and spontaneously he cried, "*Vive l'Empereur !*" with the full force of his lungs. His voice went up alone amid the twittering of the birds darting to and fro in the sunshine of the village street. No other soul present had thought of uttering a "*Vivat !*" to their Cæsar in the tarnish of defeat ; nor did any now follow the single acclamation of General Sertignes' standard-bearer, but all remained wrapped in brooding suspicion. Napoleon, however, turned his head in the direction of the solitary cry of loyalty, and Deodato fancied that for an instant the hollow eyes, with their pupils diminished by the action of some sedative drug, glimmered with recognition.

Then the Emperor climbed painfully into his carriage, and Marshal Bazaine, who had been waiting with his Staff and standard in the middle of the street, spurred forward to take leave of him. Deodato

now seeing Bazaine for the first time since he had arrived in Metz, thought the Marshal had greatly changed since the last glimpse he had caught of him at the Tuileries Ball in the year of the Exhibition. He had grown fat and heavy ; his neck bulged at the back over his embroidered collar ; his Chinese cheeks were puffy ; his little black eyes seemed more inscrutable than ever. He contrived a courtier's smile, however, as he saluted and fell back from the carriage-wheel, while the cortège set off at a rapid trot amid the same stupefied silence of the onlookers.

With misty eyes Deodato watched it go, Dragoons of his own old regiment, the Empress's, in front, Cent-Gardes, in the shorn splendour of their campaigning dress—cocked hats and unarmoured tunics—riding on either side, Lancers of the Guard bringing up the rear. At the cross-roads it wheeled and made for the lesser road to Verdun by Verneville and Jarny. Fainter and fainter grew the stately, rhythmical trot, and Deodato felt a whole epoch of his life receding from him and passing into memories. *Trot, trot . . . jingle, jingle . . .* dying away on the ear . . . the Emperor of the French had set out on the long road that was to end only at Sedan. . . . *Clop, clop . . .* barely audible. . . . "M. Charles" had vanished from Deodato's sight for ever.

And suddenly in the gold-dusted emptiness of the village street Marshal Bazaine seemed to wake to new life. Gathering his Staff round him, he gave orders with emphatic gestures, and in a few minutes Gravelotte echoed to the horse-hoofs of messengers dispersing to the various headquarters of the troops gathered round the place. In a short while bugles began to blow, and trumpets from the more distant cavalry positions. Deodato started as he heard them, for he knew those calls. "Unsaddle . . . Horses to water!" for the cavalry ; "Dismiss. . . . Orderlies to the Commissariat!" for the infantry. The Marshal and his great Staff had disappeared, and General Sertignes, who had left his carriage to salute the Emperor's departure, came hobbling back, calling to Delangle, "Orders to make the soup! . . . No movement before this afternoon! . . . Come back to the Cheval d'Or with me, Delangle, and you, Levassier, and see about *déjeuner*! An omelette and a cutlet . . . with salad, if they have it, will do for me."

An air of relaxation had set in. Fatigue parties appeared with loads of wood ; others tramped past with joints of meat and long

loaves from the *Intendance*; fires began to be lighted and camp-cauldrons to simmer over them. On the outskirts of Gravelotte horses could be seen being led to water. The Chasseurs of General Sertigues's escort were allowed to dismount and unstrap their tin *gamelles* for cooking their soup on a grass-plot, just off the road. The sun was getting high now and pouring down rays that blinded, the prelude to a scorching day. The distant fields and woods showed in firm outline and delicacy of colouring. The church-clock of Gravelotte struck six out of the swimming blue.

Deodato was bewildered. What were they stopping here for? The march to Verdun, surely, was decided upon; the Emperor had gone on ahead; why did they delay to follow? The two Prussian Armies of Steinmetz and the Red Prince Frederick Charles, heavily outnumbering them, were on their heels; if it were true, as camp rumour had asserted all through the night, that they had made a loop to the south of Metz and were coming up through the ravines from Gorze into those woods below there, they might catch the French Army on the flank during its march. It had, indeed, been reported that French cavalry patrols more energetic than those directed by General Sertigues de Messimy had the afternoon before exchanged shots with Prussian cavalry as far west as Mars-la-Tour. . . . The enemy moved fast! They might be threatening even to cut the line of the retreat!

Over the soup, which they shared out of the same *gabelle*, he confided his doubts to the Trumpeter Duroc, who from the habit of attending commanding officers had become a first-class mess-tin strategist.

"I will explain to you, *mon bourgeois!*" he declared, tapping the *gabelle* with his spoon, "we are waiting for the Third and Fourth Corps to join us. What the devil? The only ones who have arrived are Frossard, now at Rezonville over there," he pointed with the spoon; "the Guard just behind us, and old Canrobert—you can't hold *him* back!—who is covering our right, the other side of the road. But Lebœuf is held up at Verneville still . . . one or two gaiter-buttons missing," Duroc winked, "in spite of his famous boast . . . and as for Ladmirault with the Fourth Corps, who had at least the sense to find a road for himself right away north through Saint-Privat, I don't think half his divisions have got clear of Metz yet. . . . We can't go on without them, can we, *mon gars?*"

Deodato remained unconvinced. If they were going to march,

why did they not move forward and leave the roads clear for the oncoming Corps? . . . However, strategy was none of the business of Private Caprano, he reflected; and after giving Duroc a cigarette for his pains, he lit one himself, and strolled away alone to a low farmyard wall under some trees, where he sat listening to the clucking of fowls and enjoying the beauty of the morning.

(4)

It was the first moment he had had since the march began to think of anything personal. Immediately, his thoughts, released from military concerns, ran back to an encounter he had made two mornings ago inside the cathedral of Metz. He had been sent into the city by General Sertigues with a message (actually an invitation to dinner) for a member of the General Staff at the Prefecture in the lovely curving eighteenth century Place de la Comédie. He had been told to come back in an hour for the answer, and had betaken himself, to wait, into the tall, Gothic gloom of the cathedral. The slim columns ran up into shadow; upon the stones of the nave lay purple and crimson gems thrown from the magnificent glass in the apse and transept; a mass-bell tinkled in the distant choir at the top of its high flight of steps; fumes of incense seemed to have encrusted themselves round the shafts of the pillars. Deodato felt an immediate relief from the strain and fret of this campaign in which he was forced to play a private's part with an officer's knowledge; the peaceful aroma of his Roman youth stole towards him on wings of memory; he breathed deep with relief in the coolness.

Then his eye was caught by a blaze of light in a corner at the west end. Here close to the wine-coloured porphyry of the ancient Roman bath—the *cuve de César*—used as a font, stood a black wood figure of the Virgin, crowned, and vested in a white silk cope. Behind her glittered a network of votive hearts lit by a grove of tapers, and around were gathered, as silent and almost as still as the image itself, the women of Metz, from the rich and the fashionable to peasant girls in their national black lace head-dresses and old women in white coifs and sabots. In the warm and breathing silence created by the supplications of this assemblage, Deodato, drawing near, stood fascinated by the long, melancholy faces of the Lorraine girls, with the mystery of centuries of dread and strife in

their black, tragic eyes. Then, overcome by atavism and early recollections, he dropped on his knees beside them, and added his wordless aspirations towards the Spirit of all Life to their *pater nosters* and *aves*.

He felt again, as he knelt there, the immensity of his debt to France and to the Empire; the grandeurs and pleasures that had been showered on him during his life as soldier, courtier and artist; the inspiration poured into his creative soul by the sumptuous Imperial pageant, in which, it seemed, the Renaissance, with its bearded men, its queenly women, its cornucopia of carelessly squandered magnificence had risen again as a spirit on the grey waters of the utilitarian nineteenth century. . . . Now was the time to pay his debt with sternest resolution!

In the midst of these impassioned meditations Deodato had had a sudden, curious sense of being watched. . . . He looked about him; and then saw, on the further side of the glittering pyramid of votive tapers, the countenance of Ludovica, hanging, it seemed, in the gloom, thin, and with a touch of alabaster transparency against the crimson of the old font behind her. . . . She was looking at him, her pale-brown eyes larger than ever in her sorrow-worn face, not only recognising him in his Private's uniform, but entreating him. . . . He had never known such an imploring agony as shone in her gaze, motionless though she knelt, with her hands, as he could observe now that his sight was clearer in the twilight, clasped over her rosary, the tears falling out of the corners of her eyes and trembling on the wide ridges of her cheeks. . .

It was not surprising that he should thus have encountered her. The possibility of some painful meeting had been in the back of his mind from the moment he had entered Metz by the Porte Serpenoise with the Chasseurs on the morning of their detrainment. He knew that the Duke of Smolensk, who, on the outbreak of war had been at his post in Metz, had been put in command of a Division of the Third Corps, and he had presumed that the Duchess would be in the city or at their villa at Jussy on the outskirts. . . . And here she was, with that terrible pleading in her eyes . . . but what was the good of it? He felt no bitterness any longer . . . it was no time for private feuds . . . he knew only at this moment how profoundly, how irrevocably, he still loved her. But to trust her again ever—that was impossible! It was beyond his power if he had desired it never so much. And abruptly, feeling the uselessness

of kneeling there, furtively looking at her from under his lowered lids, he got upon his feet. It was only a sword in his heart to see her; he would go back at once to his duties.

Turning, he marched away with his spurs tinkling on the pavement, towards the door; then, with his hand lifting the leather curtain, dropped it again, paused, hesitated, and wandered slowly back, struggling with himself. Arrived again at the corner with the glow of candles, he looked round, and found that Ludovica had disappeared. He had been saved, he thought, from his own weakness. Then something puzzling caught his eye. On the white vesture of the Madonna gleamed a golden jewel that had not been there before. A suspicion came into his mind, and edging his way through the now diminished throng of devotees, he drew close enough to the image to confirm it. It was the byzantine reliquary in which for years Ludovica had borne round her neck the splinter of the Holy Cross, the treasure of her family. What had possessed her to leave it on the bosom of the wooden Virgin? An offering to lend force to her intercessions? A supreme sacrifice to win from Heaven the granting of her desire? He could not understand it, and with a troubled sigh left the cathedral and mounted his horse which he had tethered to the railings. . . .

Well, Private Caprano reflected, as he ground out the stub of his cigarette under his heel in the grass, that was all he had seen of her. True, they had while riding out from Metz passed her villa at Jussy, at the top of the winding hill-road from Moulins, standing back in its grey-walled garden, with wrought-iron gates upon the high-road. General Sertigues had asked who it belonged to, and admired the vivid splash of the geraniums trailing over the stone urns on the gate-pillars.

As Deodato strolled back into the village to find out what was going on nine o'clock struck from the church. How time had slid by while he was dreaming! In the main street the first thing he saw was the General's famous van, standing triumphantly in front of the Cheval d'Or, with the Chasseurs of the escort gathered round it and trying to guess at its contents. There was growing laughter, and at length one fellow more impudent than the rest, a Parisian, after a glance round to see if Sergeant Lablache was near, jumped on the step and peered in at the little window at the back. He came down, slapping his thigh and bent double with hilarity.

"What is it? What is it?" cried his comrades, clustering round him and trying to shake him into articulateness. He gasped out something between his gusts of laughter, and the words were caught up and circulated amid wider and wider rings of soldiery who had collected to the place of disturbance. "*Un cabinet de toilette! C'est un cabinet de toilette!*" The news spread amid Rabelaisian howls of joy.

Suddenly, quenching the shouting and the laughter, a deep *boom! boom!* reverberated through the streets of Gravelotte. "It's *them!*" cried the trumpeter Duroc. "Didn't I tell you?"

CHAPTER TWO

REZONVILLE

(1)

BY the time General Sertigues de Messimy with his Staff and escort reached the foot of the white slope leading up between the poplars to Rezonville those first cannon-shots had swelled to a hell's orchestra of gunfire, and the whole dim distance in front of the screen of woods was spirting and smoking. Round the square tower of Rezonville church graceful puff-balls, emitting stabs of flame, burst like bouquets from the German artillery. From beyond the village mounted the rolling clangour of chassepots and the rattle of mitrailleuses, proving that the whole of Frossard's Corps was engaged. As they began to mount the slope at the slow pace of the docile charger on to which General Sertigues had at last been hoisted with the aid of steps, they saw a regiment of the Line doubling through the outskirts of the village, their towering knapsacks (piled with pots, pans, pegs, poles and the rolled canvas of their little tents) pressing them down like red-breeched sons of Sisyphus.

The Staff made poor progress up the hill, for the General could ride no faster than a walk ; and Delangle chafed horribly, cantering on ahead and sending messengers this way and that in quest of their Division, which had camped round Vionville last night in charge of a Brigadier, General Oncq (aged sixty-seven). Wounded men began to straggle across the road from the field of conflict, some limping, some holding their arms or shoulders, some supported or carried by comrades ; then the *brancardiers* with their new-fangled Red Cross brassards appeared, manœuvring their stretchers with merciful skill over the ditch on to the roadway. They did not please General Sertigues, however, who rated them for obstructing the way with their wounded. In the yard of a farm close by two Surgeons had made an emergency casualty station, and were

now putting on hurried first dressings amid groans and complaints of "*M. le Major! Ici, M. le Major! A moi par pitié, M. le Major!*"

General Sertigues was still waving angrily at the stretcher-bearers when, like a gust of wind, Marshal Canrobert dashed past coming from Rezonville, bent forward over the mane of his horse, his theatrical white locks flying, his standard-bearer pointing the *fanion* like a lance. Delangle laid a hurried hand on General Sertigues' bridle, for he had nearly been unseated by Canrobert's Staff, and drew him to safety at the side of the road. The enemy artillery seemed at the moment to be concentrating their fire on Rezonville. The bursting shells brought showers of tiles clattering down from roofs, set cottages and barns ablaze, struck the church tower and knocked its cross sideways. From a flaming farmyard came piteous bellowings of entrapped cattle and the squawking of poultry. A shot struck a poplar by the roadside just over the heads of General Sertigues' Staff, and smothered them with leaves, twigs and broken branches. Delangle guided his ancient chief into a place of more security under the wall of a solid-looking barn at the entry to the village street.

Then trumpets sounded, and with a cry of relief the Colonel pointed to the Division, Cuirassiers and Chasseurs, coming in good order through the village in retreat from Vionville. "I was wondering if we still had a command at all!" he remarked.

"Let's join our people, Delangle!" said the General in a quavering voice. Deodato felt sorry for the old man. His purpose was gallant, but, with his bleared eyes and shaky hands clutching the reins, he was a mere wreck of the *beau sabreur* he had been in his prime. His worn-out frame could no longer stand the roar of the cannonade, the motion of his horse, the vague, helpless sense of responsibility. He tried to give some order, but his voice was drowned in the battle-fury beyond the village, which swelled at that instant to a deafening violence. Bugle calls and shouts were heard, and the church-tower and the houses round it disappeared in wreathing smoke. The next minute a battalion of infantry in disorderly retirement came pouring out of lanes and enclosures and broke like a wave over the road, some stumbling in the ditch at the wayside; some falling with a crash of their weapons, pots and pans in the dust, where they lay writhing and unable to crawl under their loads; others crying and gesticulating to each other,

while their officers, crimson-faced and sweating, sought to rally them with voice and sword. Ambulance men and a train of mules bearing chair-saddles for the transport of the wounded arrived to add to the swirling confusion, and all the time the guns thundered unceasingly, the rain of twigs from the trees continued, and the sky overhead, its morning blue stained and sullied, grew gradually murky as a November day.

How Marshal Bazaine came upon them Deodato did not see. But suddenly he was there in the midst, a squat figure on a powerful charger, with only his aide-de-camp and one or two other officers behind him. His presence seemed instantly to check the panic. Lifting his gold-embroidered képi, he cried cheerily to the huddled infantry-men, "Come boys! Rally round your old Marshal!" and the ranks were seen to run together and consolidate at his voice. "Now then! *En avant!* the 23rd!" he called, and with a shout of "*Vive la France!*" the infantry-men went forward again.

The Marshal turned his head sharply to Sertigues de Messimy. "General!" he ordered, "withdraw your men to the north of the village; align with General Forton's Division in the hollow out of range, and await orders! . . . Ah! here come the guns at last!"

While speaking to General Sertigues he had caught sight out of the corner of his sharp black eye of an artillery battery coming plunging over the fields and preparing to cross the road at a bound between the ravaged poplars. In a second he was galloping to meet it, waving his arm to point the direction; and his figure dwindled along the white ribbon of the highway.

Deodato felt his heart grow warm. They had really a Chief, then, at last! Calm, collected, knowing where every unit was and where he wanted it to go! Bazaine was justifying his reputation!

A fresh rattle of hoofs interrupted his thought. Out of a cross-road between houses swung General Frossard, lank and haggard, with his lined mathematician's face. Seeing a General and his staff. "Where is the Commander-in-Chief?" he shouted in his tense, dry voice. "Have any of you seen him? . . . Answer me! *Tonnerre de Dieu!*"

General Sertigues' officers turned in their saddles and shaded their eyes; but there was no longer any sign of the Marshal on the road by which he had disappeared. Frossard pulled up a moment

opposite to Sertigues. "General! I shall want your cavalry, at any rate! I shall want all the cavalry I can get! We have lost the farm of Flavigny, and had to withdraw to the outskirts of Vionville—the place is a mass of flames! . . . Get your cavalry ready to charge, d'you hear me?"

"He has no commands to give *me*!" muttered General Sertigues peevishly, as Frossard galloped on in search of the Commander-in-Chief. "Now, in God's name, who is *this*, Delangle?"

A staff-officer, frantic and covered with the dust of hard riding, had reined in with a jerk in front of them. "*M. le Maréchal Bazaine, Messieurs?*" he panted. "Marshal Lebœuf demands orders for the Third Corps . . . Are we to come into line and attack, or wait for General Ladmirault?"

He tumbled out these questions looking desperately from face to face of the decorated group, which did not, he came to see, include the Commander-in-Chief. Nobody answered him, because nobody had any answer to give.

"*Sacrebleu!* is there no Command at all then?" he snarled, and swinging his horse violently round collided with a file of galloping Chasseurs, who suddenly filled the street, with Canrobert's white locks and *fanion* gleaming behind them.

"Is it Marshal Bazaine?" called the veteran in his high, cracked voice. "Then where is he? *Sacré nom d'un . . .*" and for several seconds he let loose a flow of language that brought a grin to the irreverent face of the Trumpeter Duroc. "At Vionville!" he shouted, "they tell me he is at Rezonville . . . at Rezonville that he is at Gravelotte . . . at Gravelotte that he has returned here! Where the devil do you expect me to find him?" He spurred his grey horse, and charged on through Rezonville towards its western issue.

As the clatter of his escort died away a temporary lull seemed to have settled on the conflict. The artillery had ceased, and only some scattered rifle-shots were audible. In the sudden quiet the plaints of the wounded rose again like a little sighing wind. "*Oh! ma mère . . . ma mère! . . . Oh! par pitié! . . . A moi, M. le Major!*" Slowly and dreamily, as it had done for generations, the clock in the damaged church tower tolled eleven.

"Shall I give orders, General, to withdraw our men as the Marshal directed?" asked Delangle respectfully. Sertigues with a bewildered air nodded assent.

(2)

For nearly an hour they remained with the Division in a hollow behind Rezonville, listening to the renewed roar of the battle, sweeping round now to the north and indicating that the French Army's line to Verdun was definitely severed. Then from the other side of the road a galloper swept into view, crossing the frieze of poplars, and dashed up shouting, "General Sertigues de Messimy? . . . Bring your Division forward to the east limit of Rezonville! Marshal Bazaine's orders, Monsieur!"

Bazaine! The *introuvable* had been found at last then—they might hear something; learn their duty! At a slow walk, imposed by their commander's infirmity, they streamed back across the road again, and halted under the shelter of some grey houses marking the south-east edge of the village. From here Deodato had his first clear view of the field of battle. The pale green and brown slopes, obscured by clouds and patches and wisps of smoke, ran down to the sombre line of distant woods; and dotted all over them, with the sunshine striking rays from their arms, groups and companies and battalions of the blue-and-red French infantry moved about, it seemed, in confusion; retiring here, advancing there; shooting out volleys of rapid rifle-fire in one place; clustered disorderly round the glint of an uplifted eagle in another. Rippling black streaks here and there indicated artillery-teams; these too seemed to be in confusion as they shifted and galloped about like clock-work toys between the tiny copses, and in and out of the folds of the landscape. From Rezonville to this ragged, half-broken front stretched a train of dreadful wreckage, littering the carefully cultivated soil. Deodato marked the red breeches of fallen *Lignards*, the oblique lozenges of over-turned artillery limbers, the thrashing limbs of dying horses. In the middle foreground the farm of Flavigny belched flames and smoke that blotted out the neighbouring view.

"*Voilà les Prussiens!*" exclaimed Duroc the Trumpeter. "There they come! Ah! *tas de salauds!* Dirty dogs!"

Advancing on either side of the smoke-cloud of Flavigny, the Prussian masses could now be seen, immense dark-blue oblongs, with their spiked helmets making a sea of sparkling pin-points. Solidly they came on, a quicker surge at their centre and flanks betraying the advance of heavy artillery reinforcements.

"Time for us to intervene now or never, General!" murmured

Delangle, watching the movement through his glasses. "Ah! look! Here is the Marshal at last!"

As before seeming to arrive from nowhere at the centre of the conflict, the impassive Chinese face of Bazaine appeared, with his little knot of attendants, on a knoll in front of Rezonville. "Now, General, now! our orders!" hinted Delangle urgently.

Sertigues jogged forward to the Marshal, who turned a smiling face towards him as if they were meeting in the Bois de Boulogne. "*Eh, mon vieux, comment ça va?*" he hailed him gaily. "Things are getting hot, aren't they?"

"What orders have you for me, *M. le Maréchal?*" demanded General Sertigues, saluting with a tremulous hand.

"Orders? For you?" Bazaine smiled again. "None, old friend! Stay where you are . . . or better still, move back behind Rezonville. Wait in reserve!"

"But he sent for us himself!" groaned Delangle.

A line of Prussian batteries that had just unlimbered on a ridge behind burning Flavigny began to bellow, and there was a troubled murmur among Bazaine's officers, as the French infantry could be seen bending and streaming backwards, at some points in panic.

"*Ça chauffe!*" chuckled Bazaine, his glass to his eye.

Off the road, with a ring of trampling hoofs, came a crowd of mounted officers, led by a thin, grim old General like a ram-rod on horseback. It was the Headquarters General Staff under its chief, General Jarras. "Your *Quartier-Général* is here, *Monsieur le Maréchal* . . . we have been hunting for you everywhere!" he said, saluting with a resentful cut of his hand. "I am at your orders, Monsieur."

Bazaine turned an expressionless Oriental look on him. "Go back to where you came from, General," was all he said. "When I want the General Staff I will send for it." He turned his back on Jarras, and put up his glass again.

A thunder of angry hoofs on turf, and Frossard was in the midst of them. "Cavalry, *Monsieur le Maréchal!*" he snapped. "Cavalry! We must have a charge or our line is broken! You understand, *Monsieur le Maréchal?*" he struck a furious fist on his saddle-flap. "*Toute la ligne est f . . . !*"

Bazaine stroked his moustache, frowning. "I don't know . . ." he mumbled, "I don't know . . . I suppose we shall have to sacrifice a regiment . . ."

Frossard turned on his aides like a steel spring released. "To the Cavalry of the Guard!" he shouted. "Charge at once! Marshal Bazaine's orders!"

"But my dear General," expostulated Bazaine, "I only said I thought we *might* have to . . . Ah! what's this?"

In alignment as perfect as that of a review at Longchamps, and flaming like Furies in their crimson Hussar facings, a half-battery of the Horse Artillery of the Guard appeared over a rise, rushing to the front of the once more smoking, crashing and shrieking village of Rezonville.

"Admirable!" exclaimed the Commander-in-Chief. "Just what was needed!" He spurred his horse with jerky movements of his thick right leg, and galloped forward, rolling heavily in the saddle and calling "Captain! Captain! I will show you where to place them!" Only his *fanion* and trumpet were with him as he halted the three guns and directed them where to unlimber on a crest before the village.

"He thinks he is a Sub-Lieutenant again!" spat Jarras, the Chief of the slighted General Staff, into his rigid beard.

"*Allez, Delangle!*" murmured General Sertigues de Messimy with a resigned smile. "Withdraw my fellows . . . it was an order! I will remain here . . . not worth the pains of retiring!"

The Commander-in-Chief was still watching a particular gun, which seemed to claim the whole of his attention, as it fired and recoiled. He peered through his glasses and ordered its pointing to be altered. Suddenly a glorious call of silver trumpets resounded, and the soil trembled to the thunder and jangle of a line of steel-clad horsemen. It was the Cuirassiers of the Guard, their splendour barely dimmed by the rubs of campaigning—here and there a stain on sky-blue tunic or snowy gauntlet, a dull patch on the sheen of a long boot, a broken plume. But in the mass they were god-like as ever, trotting forward in triple line through the gay sunshine, the horsehair falls flapping from the back of their helmets, the scabbards jingling against their spurred feet. They filled the whole field of view from Rezonville to the high-road with romantic pageantry, the hot breath of excited horses, the shrilling of trumpets from which hung gorgeous, embossed *guidons*, the cries of command from the gilded officers. At their head rode the Colonel, out-topping the tallest of his giant men with the shimmering curve of his helmet.

Bazaine looked round for a moment as if astounded at their apparition. But before he could say anything the gigantic Colonel lifted himself in his stirrups, raised his gold-hilted sabre, and bellowed, in a voice like a bull's, "*Char-r-r-gez !*"

The roar was taken up by the Squadron Commanders ; the trumpets screamed ; and the first line launched itself on the charge in a dazzle of steel and flying horsehair.

Every eye on the knoll where the Staff were clustered watched them in tense silence. Deodato's heart thudded as if it would burst his tunic. He saw the Prussian skirmishers run together and retire on their supports ; then the blue blocks of the advance halt and string out into a thin line tipped with bayonets . . . Why did they not form square ? The Cuirassiers had diminished at a surprising pace. The solid gleam of their back-plates was but a streak now upon the faint green soil ; their horses tiny blobs of grey, black and brown. On they went in a curious hush that seemed to have fallen over the whole battlefield, and as they drew so close to the Prussian infantry that they hid them from view the sound of the cheer they raised came floating back all the way to Rezonville.

The enemy might have taken it for a word of command, for a crashing volley replied, and Deodato and the rest saw the line of steel and colour sag in the middle, heave and burst into brittle fragments rolling and struggling on the ground. To right and left a tattered riband of fleeting horsemen sped away from the wreckage, striving to attack the flanks of the Prussian line. Then, while the onlookers ground their teeth and shook their fists in impotent rage and sympathy, the earth shook again close by, and the second line of Cuirassiers dashed forward shouting savagely, to add themselves to the writhing hecatomb piled before the Prussian rifles. Deodato shielded his eyes with his hand, unable to bear the sight awaiting them when this second mass of armour and heavy horses should hurtle upon the fallen forms of their comrades before they could even take a sabre-cut at the rhythmically volleying men in the spiked helmets. In that moment of terrible darkness he heard a staff-officer near him say, "Heavy cavalry can no longer charge infantry armed with modern rifles," pronouncing the epilogue to a long chapter of heroic warfare.

He opened his eyes again as resolutely as he could, and now there was an uncertain wave spraying round the irreducible blue lines, and sheering away at last in ragged groups that turned

homewards. The Cuirassiers of the Imperial Guard had fought their last fight.

Back they streamed in clusters and handfuls, and with them raced dozens and scores of riderless horses, some merely terrified, some streaming with blood but not yet enfeebled, some dropping abruptly, lifting their poor heads to scream aloud, and then letting them fall with a thump to the ground, not to stir again; some limping past with broken legs swinging, and by mechanical habit stopping to nibble blades of grass as they hopped along. To Deodato, with his passion for horses, their agony was excruciating to watch. . . . One old grey, with a face of almost human nobility, staggered and collapsed at a spot near where the Staff was sitting. With a bewildered look of reproach, it rolled its glazing eye round on its masters before the lid fell over it, and the arched neck with the flowing mane sank down between its forelegs on the dusty soil . . . Deodato remembered how in the grey of earliest dawn he had passed with the escort of Chasseurs through the camp of this very regiment, and had watched the peaceful creatures, with their soft eyes, munching their feed at the start of a day which they had no means of foretelling would be different from any other of their well-tended lives. . . .

But now behind the horses, staggering stiffly and painfully along in their high jack-boots, came wounded and dismounted Cuirassiers, some unhelmeted, some without their armour, which they had shed to enable them to rise from the ground after their fall, some assisting stricken comrades or officers, some still clinging to the saddle in spite of wounds, with the dints of bullets spotting the gilt and steel of their cuirasses. One pale colossus walked forward somnambulistically, no one could tell how, with an arm completely severed, and his gauntlet thrust into the wound to staunch the bleeding. . . .

"Ah! stop! stop!" cried Deodato wildly. For there was another rumble and tremble of the ground, and—incredibly—the third, reserve line of the indomitable Cuirassiers swept forward, to add their useless sacrifice to that of their comrades. . . .

(3)

Marshal Bazaine had watched the debris of this last, forlorn endeavour drift back behind that of the earlier charges. Then, with what seemed to Deodato a rather callous shrug, he turned to

the commander of his favourite half-battery. "At least we need no longer hold our fire, Captain!" he said briskly. "Pound their infantry at 1,800 metres!"

"Our shells have no intermediate range between 1,600 and 2,500 metres, *M. le Maréchal*," the artillery officer reminded him. "And the Prussians know it, too!" he added moodily.

Bazaine grimaced, and was about to give a different order when a raucous Teutonic yell split the air, and, springing goblin-wise from a concealed dip of the ground, a cloud of black Hussars with sulphurous yellow facings like corpse-candles burst upon the battery and the stout figure of the Marshal, thrusting and slashing with the fury of demons. A warning shout of "Brunswickers!" went up, and Deodato saw Bazaine standing up in his stirrups, his short legs thrust out, his sabre whirling in his hand, his face split in a grin of savage delight at the relief of personal combat. He saw the flame-bedizened Guard gunners toppling under the blades of the enemy horsemen, crawling under their guns for refuge, or resisting with rammers; then the mass of the Brunswickers, roaring victoriously at their successful surprise, swooped upon the great General Staff, gathered some hundred yards behind the Marshal, and already thrown into disarray by the crashing in among them of the frightened artillery-limbers. In a few moments the whole shouting, cursing mass swayed backwards, and shot like a stream from a burst pipe onto the highway. At the same instant the blue-and-white Hussars of Bazaine's personal escort, banished by him to a distance like the Staff, came galloping across the road and hurled themselves with shattering effect into the *mêlée*.

As the human and equine landslide began to slip and break towards the rear, General Sertigues de Messimy's charger, docile though it was, was caught by the panic and made a leap to join the other flying horses. The old man shot straight over its head, hitting the ground with a thud, and laying there crumpled, with his smart képi lost and the scanty hairs on his dented old pate revealed.

Deodato with a wrench pulled his own charger back on its haunches and tumbled out of the saddle, drawing his sabre and leaving *fanion* and horse to shift for themselves. Astride across the General's body he felt his sabre vibrate as it clashed with the blade of a Brunswicker, and a jarring twinge in his weak shoulder. Then came a red-hot sting as another sword ripped his left sleeve and grazed the flesh. He flung himself down upon the General to shield him,

while a whole charge of cavalry seemed to whirl overhead, flashing legs and hoofs, great brown and grey bellies . . . Deodato was thankful ever afterwards that he resisted the temptation to plunge his sword into one of these horses as they raced over him. Then by one of the miraculous transitions of a battlefield he found himself alone under the sky.

Not a horseman was in view. From beyond the ridge across the road, where a small windmill stuck up against the sky-line, came a distant shouting and sob of trumpets; but Bazaine had disappeared, the General Staff, the Brunswick Hussars had all vanished. Round the ravaged half-battery lay the corpses of the gunners of the Guard; in the grass were stretched two or three of the black-and-yellow Germans and one of the Marshal's blue Hussars; dead horses made mounds that shut out the view, the empty stirrups on their saddles gleaming . . . and underneath him lay an unconscious old man, whose heart still feebly beat, and who must somehow be carried into safety.

Deodato tottered to his feet; then stooped and, despite his own hurts, contrived to hoist the little shrunken skeleton, so pathetically light, upon his shoulder. Then he staggered away, hardly knowing what direction he was taking.

The sun beat down savagely, bathing him in sweat; the dust filled his throat, and the scent of crushed grass his nostrils. He panted onwards, and abruptly the roar of artillery fire swept up again across the horizon, filling the whole air with its throb, and causing his head to reverberate, swell and shrink in a sickening fashion. "*Ah! taisez-vous! taisez-vous!*" he cried furiously. "Shut up! Shut up!" His voice was a parched croak in the thunder.

Presently he found himself, on lifting his eyes from the ground, over which he had been painfully stumbling, on the outskirts of a farm some way from the southern edge of Rezonville . . . He must have badly mistaken his course! . . . He was outside a forecourt with a low white wall and an arched gateway in the middle. A row of little trees ran round the inside of the court, and, unsubdued by the distant rumbling of the guns, the celestial trickle of a tiny stream sang close by. The place had evidently been loop-holed and prepared for defence at some earlier moment of the day, and a shot must have struck the wall, which was tumbled into ruin at a corner where it overlooked the field of strife below.

Deodato reeled through the wooden gate, half-torn from its

hinges, and laid down his General, as gently as he could on the softest bed he could find, a heap of dung-hill straw just under the breach in the wall. Then he stood up to look about him.

With horror he perceived that the place was like a mortuary. All about were stretched the giant forms of the Cuirassiers of the Guard, most of them stiff in death, a few faintly twitching or restlessly tossing. Two or three less sorely wounded comrades, one with a crimson-drenched bandage round his head, were doing their best to minister to them, with the help of a couple of civilian Red Cross workers. The courtyard was mournfully still, in spite of that remote, unceasing thunder. The dead gazed up at the sky, and the flies buzzed about their moustaches and jutting imperials; the wounded uttered only low gasps, and the unseen water trickled, trickled tantalisingly.

Suddenly Deodato heard a little, sighing voice behind him. "What's the matter with the old one, then, Chasseur?" He turned and beheld that same little cantinière—how well he remembered her!—whom he had admired wheeling and prancing on her Arab grey that day at the Longchamps review. Her fair hair was now a tangle; her eyes burned strainedly from purple-tinged hollows; she had a great bruise on her temple. She had lost her plumed hat, her ballet-skirt hung in shreds round her soil-stained white riding-breeches, one of the coquettish silver spurs was twisted off her dust-coated boots. "*Qu'y-a-t'il?*" she asked again in her sighing voice, "*Que faire pour le vieux?*"

"This is General Sertigues de Messimy, Madame," Deodato explained. "He has been thrown from his horse. He is stunned, but not wounded, and happily I do not think any bones are broken."

The cantinière slung back her barrel of spirits, and pulling round her tin pannikin, poured water from it into her grimy little hand, and, crouching down, began to bathe the old man's forehead.

"So they have brought your wounded here, too," said Deodato. "They have done gloriously, Madame, your Cuirassiers of the Guard!"

"Ah! *les pauvres bougres!*" sighed the girl. "They have done themselves no good. *Moi, je m'en fiche de la gloire!* Will glory give me back my man, Sergeant Bruchard, whom the Prussians have led away prisoner? Will glory bring back the boys, my big, brave boys? Look at them there, look at them!" Sobs shook her while she tried with pathetic fortitude to continue her task of reviving the

General, pausing from moment to moment to wipe the tears off her cheeks, and leaving grimy bars across it as she did so. "Some of them stiff," she gulped, "like the figures in the waxwork museum . . . Max, and Guillaume and *le grand Lejay* . . . And the others suffering . . . suffering . . . and I can do nothing for them."

"Courage, Madame!" answered Deodato. "Your husband will come back to you one day!"

She did not seem to hear him. "With that," she continued, "look what they have done to me, the villains! They have killed my Fauvette, Chasseur, killed her with a bullet through the eye, like that! . . . *La pauvre bête!*"

"But you never rode in that charge?" exclaimed Deodato aghast.

"*Parbleu!* For sure, I wasn't going to let the boys go alone! 'Keep out of it, Lisette!' the Colonel ordered me, 'this is no game for women!' But the Adjudant he understood, and 'Come on, Lisette! *Char-rrgez, Lisette!*' he shouted to me like a devil."

"He did wrong!" said Deodato sharply. "But he was mad . . . I think we are all mad!"

"For sure, he was wrong!" assented Lisette. "See what they did to my boys and my poor mare . . . Oh! that was a filthy tumble! I thought every bone I had was shattered . . . I am so bruised," she pressed her hands to her sides, "that it hurts me to breathe." She broke off. "He is not dead, you know, your old man; he is breathing better than I can. You ought to find a mule *cacolet* for him. He is your grandfather, is it not true?"

There was a wild look in her eye, and Deodato guessed that the knock on her temple had driven her a little queer.

"We shall do very well now, Madame," he said gently; "thank you for your help. You had better see if you can do something more for your own poor fellows."

"And what shall I do for them?" She limped across to the breach in the wall, and let herself drop on the broken stones in the gap, her chin on her hands, her matted hair falling over her forehead. "They are finished! You understand? It is all over with the Cuirassiers! *Rien ne va plus, Chasseur!* . . . *Finie, la Garde! Finie!*"

Huddled on the heap of ruin, with the sun glinting for the last time on the gilt cuirasses of the dead and dying cavalrymen at her feet, and the blue sky overhead arching down to the unseen battlefield below with its unrelenting thunder, she took on for the

moment to Deodato's eye the look of a tragic Muse. Was she . . . could she be . . . crooning in that sighing little vulgar voice of hers the dirge of the Empire? Ah! No! His spirit revolted. The war was not lost . . . the battle was not lost even . . . because one superb regiment had been sacrificed. Begging one of the civilian Red Cross men to look after the General, he ran out of the enclosure to find an ambulance, a mule, any kind of transport.

And as he made off in the direction of Rezonville, now visible as a huge daylight torch with the cloud of smoke twisting over its flaming roofs, he suddenly heard behind a swelling to his right a steady pulse of drums, the bark of orders, a tumult of cheering and acclamation. "Here they come! *V'la la Garde!* . . . Forward, Grenadiers! . . . Voltigeurs, at the double! . . . *La Garde s'avance! Hourra!*"

His heart leaped, he waved his busby, all alone, in the air. The Guard was at hand! There was no more to fear!

JUSSY

(I)

ON reaching the fringe of Rezonville Deodato saw among the first groups he encountered Colonel Delangle with the Staff of General Sertigues' Division sitting disconsolately behind a line of batteries that was pounding away in support of the reconstituted French position round the village.

Delangle caught sight of him coming, and trotted anxiously towards him. Deodato saluted and told the story of the General's mishap. "Concussion of the brain, I fear, Colonel," he concluded.

"*Que voulez-vous ?*" said Delangle with an exasperated shrug, seeming to forget for a moment that he was talking to a Private, not a fellow-officer. "If our Cavalry Generals *will* ride! . . ." He recollected himself, and commanded curtly, "Seek an ambulance; there must be some waiting in the village. Take the General back to Gravelotte to the Cheval d'Or, and put him to bed; I must not leave the staff, and his Aide-de-Camp has been hit. Stay with him and see if he regains consciousness and gives any orders . . . Your arm is bleeding, Caprano!"

"It is only a scratch, *mon Colonel*."

"Have it attended to."

"Shall I report to General Oncq, when I return, *mon Colonel*?"

Delangle threw out his arms despairingly. "There is no General Oncq! He was still in bed this morning when the Prussians sent a shell through the ceiling of his room at Vionville, and now he is incapacitated by shock. Find me and report to me. Now go!"

Deodato hesitated. "The Marshal, Colonel? Was he saved?"

"Yes," answered Delangle drily; "they found him at Villers-aux-Bois . . . I don't know how far away. For an hour we thought we had no Commander-in-Chief . . . Hurry now, Caprano!"

In blazing Rezonville Deodato could find nothing better than a mule and two ambulance men, even for a General; and when they had

transported Sertigues on the beast as far as Gravelotte they found that every house in the village, including the Cheval d'Or, was crammed with wounded officers and men, and there seemed nowhere to take him in. A medical officer of superior rank, who examined him briefly outside the inn, said, "Carry him back to Metz! He has a comfortable carriage with cushions, has he not? . . . He will be in bed for days, at his age. He is better in Metz, unless," he added, "they will receive him at one of the private houses on the road."

Deodato went round and found the General's landau with its coachman and footman, who propped him, still unconscious, across the two seats on cushions. Then, with Deodato, who had mounted a dead soldier's horse he had picked up in the village, riding beside the carriage, they set off at a slow trot along the road to Metz. They were impeded by trains of ambulance-waggon and endless files of mule *cacolets*, from whose loads of misery long trails of blood dripped among the animals' hoofs; and by belated detachments of the Third and Fourth Corps still plodding up in the opposite direction to find their places in the line. Through these came trotting impatiently a General Officer with two orderlies trying to clear the way before him. As he passed, Deodato recognised with a chilly shock the tigerish eyes and razor-like profile of the Duke of Smolensk.

By the time they reached Jussy, General Sertigues looked so deathly, his pulse had grown so weak, that on the anxious suggestion of his footman, they stopped outside the first good house they came to on the road. It was not till they had rung at the bell, and prepared to lift the General down, that Deodato realised it was the Duchess of Smolensk's villa.

By a fortunate chance, the Duchess was there, with the gardener and a single maid-servant she had brought from Metz the day before to help her pack and remove some valuables into the city; and she at once agreed to have a bed made up and to stay with the girl to nurse General Sertigues.

Deodato went into the garden to wait while the General was put to bed, and sat down, feverish and exhausted, on a stone seat in a secluded little arbour at the back of the house. He was thankful for the tranquillity, for the peaceful hum of insects among the flowers, though even at this distance, even across the ravine of the Mance which separated Jussy from the battlefield, the ground-swell of the guns still rumbled, and from time to time made the windows of the villa leap and rattle.

He was sitting with his head on his hand when a light footstep on the gravel-path made him look up. Ludovica, dressed in black, with a black lace head-dress protecting her hair, stood before him. "General Sertigues has not come to himself yet," she said in a calm voice; "but he seems better since the jolting of the carriage has stopped, and we have been able to pour a few drops of cordial between his teeth. We have applied hot bottles to his feet, and he must be left quiet." She took a step forward, and said in another tone. "You have hurt your arm?"

Deodato looked away from her. "It is not serious," he murmured.

"You must let me examine it . . . it is your duty . . . please!"

He stood up, and removed his tunic. She surveyed the cut anxiously. "It must be washed and bandaged at once!" she exclaimed, and hurried back to the house, returning with a basin of warm water and strips of linen. Deodato sat down on the stone seat again and acquiesced silently in her ministrations. There was, as he knew there would be, a soothing quality in the touch of her long, square-tipped fingers; it made him tremble with poignant memories, and he turned his head resolutely away so as not to look at her. Then he felt a touch softer than that of the fingers on his flesh, and turned with a start to see her lips on his arm, her golden hair under its black lace bent over it, and her body shaking with sobs.

"Do not! Ah! do not!" he murmured brokenly. "Of what use can it be? Oh! spare me, Ludovica!"

"Why did you fly from me in the cathedral? I had to speak to you."

"Why tear open old wounds to no purpose?"

"You do not know what I did there."

"I saw you had offered the relic of the Santacroces to the Madonna . . . the relic," he added in a stifled voice, "on which you foreswore yourself to me!"

"Never," she said firmly, "never Deodato! . . . But *now* I mean to be forsworn!" she added in a hard voice.

"I don't understand—" he said frowning.

"I will tell you . . . But let me go on with your bandage . . . I gave back the Cross of the Santacroces to God that I might be free to be a perjurer . . . that I might gain the liberty to tell you at last the whole truth, against my most sacred oath . . . Ah! what a relief, what a joy, my dear, dear one . . . I may have

damned myself, but you shall know that I was white. You shall acquit me, though God condemns me . . . and what else matters to me ? ”

“ Acquit you, Ludovica ? Of what ? What oath did you take ? And when ? ”

“ I remember it was about the time you first appeared in Paris. After the Italian campaign. On the True Cross of our family, Louis Napoleon then compelled me to swear that I would never reveal to a soul, not to my father while he was still living, not to my husband, not to the nearest and dearest to my heart, that I was the voice by which he whispered his secret will to the rulers of Italy.”

“ But he trusted your husband ! Smolensk was a champion of the Italian cause, surely ? ”

“ He trusts no one, he never has. He had one voice for his Council and for his Ministers, for the Empress and for Europe, the voice that lulled the Powers and soothed the French churchmen and Conservatives, the Pope himself. After Solferino he had to use that voice again and again. But there was a second voice, that of the Carbonaro, the conspirator, the maker of Revolutions, that said to Victor Emmanuel, to Cavour, to Rattazzi, ‘ Go on ! Go on ! *Il faut en finir !* Seize your prize, make Italy one ! ’ . . . Ah ! I know it was a sin for me to join in deceiving the Holy Father . . . but what could I do ? It was Italy first. It had been I who when I reached Paris brought Napoleon and Cavour together at Plombières, and there the resurrection of my country was planned . . . And at Villafranca the Emperor betrayed me, making a peace that left us only the fragment of an Italian kingdom . . . and the great heart of Cavour nearly broke. But then Napoleon, putting me on the oath he judged I dare never break, sent me to Caprera, to Garibaldi, to bid him set sail for Sicily and attack the Kingdom of Naples. . . . I remember to-day how Garibaldi went straight to the wall of his little cottage and buckled on his sword, saying, ‘ I trust you, most brave and beautiful. But your Emperor . . . *him* I do not trust one inch ! ’ And I rebuked him and bade him have faith ; and when I thought that all had been betrayed again in the Tuileries, by night Napoleon sought me out, and gave me a message to send to Cavour, bidding him join hands with Garibaldi, ‘ *Fate, ma fate presto !* What thou doest, do quickly ! ’ And Cavour saw it done before he died.”

“ Napoleon used to visit you by night for that purpose ? ” exclaimed

Deodato. "The night I detected him at Fontainebleau . . . and in Paris the night of Berezowski's attempt——"

"If you had not broken in on us that night, if Piero had not made his mad attack, Rome would to-day be the capital of united Italy—Italy, 'the love that bound us together,' as you heard him say. I had fled from Court, as you know, for two years. Napoleon learnt by chance I had come back to Paris for a night or two, and, needing a secret intermediary at the moment, resolved to use me again. I was to have telegraphed to Garibaldi in our code to invade the Papal States, relying on France's neutrality . . . But from that moment Louis Napoleon lost all faith in me, believed I had plotted to assassinate him. You heard him say '*Jamais ! Jamais !*' . . . and when Garibaldi marched later in that year French troops met him at Mentana and scattered his men with their new chassepots . . . Ah ! " Ludovica broke off bitterly, listening to the faraway cannonade of Rezonville. "They trusted in their chassepots ; they are needing them to-day, up yonder ! But the army of united Italy would have been a better help to Louis Napoleon in this hour ! "

"If this is truly the reason of your secret meetings with the Emperor . . . in your bed-room, even . . . why did you let me be deceived and suffer so, Ludovica ? " he demanded in a trembling tone.

She looked up at him with a tragic smile. "I was not yet ready to break my oath, even for you, Deodato," she said.

Deodato clutched at the tangles of hair on his temples distractedly. "It is incredible ! " he cried. "And your husband . . . he knew . . . he did not know ? "

"Napoleon was insistent he should not know . . . but he did."

"And what did he believe ? "

"That the Emperor was my lover . . . naturally."

"And you left him under that delusion ? "

Ludovica looked steadfastly at him while a crimson wave surged over her face and neck.

"It was not altogether a delusion," she said.

"Ah ! I thought so . . . you confess——" Deodato started from the seat, upsetting the basin with which she had been bathing his hurt.

"I have nothing to confess . . . except that I was forced to endure a constant siege of my honour . . . You know Louis Napoleon ; he is the most sensual of mankind, he cannot help himself.

He marked me down from the instant I arrived in Paris . . . I was only an innocent child then really . . . but after I became his prisoner, bound in the chain of my oath, he was unrelenting." She shivered. "How I remember his first attempt! . . . that was before he gained his cruel hold on me. I was traversing one of the dark corridors of the Tuileries, carrying a message from the Empress, when I crossed him alone, ascending by his private stairway to her Majesty's rooms. I stopped to curtsy, and he stopped too under a gas-lamp, regarding me—I can see him at this instant—and smiling in that furtive way of his while he sleeked his moustaches. Suddenly, '*Que vous êtes belle!* How beautiful you are to-night!' he murmured in that doughy voice with which he shows his tenderness. 'Even in this dim light, Duchess, you shine . . . those shoulders!' I was rooted where I stood. I did not know what to do or say. 'You are as lovely as a statue,' he went on in his pasty murmur; 'Galatea, is it not so? Fain would I be the Pygmalion to wake you to life . . . to love!' Ah! *Deodato mio*, it was ridiculous . . . and revolting . . . the syrupy way he shot out the word *amour* between his fleshy lips . . . I could see them in the gas-light, red and moist among the thick hair . . . I picked up my skirt, and turned to run, but he . . . he was not ashamed to do this, the Emperor! . . . he caught me by the arm and kissed my shoulder . . . It seemed to burn like a branding-iron; I fell against the wall for a moment, trembling . . . and I saw him still there under the crinkled pink gas-globe, immobile, his great head and nose sunk forward, smiling triumphantly at me . . . and yet . . . he is so strange . . . his eyes not triumphant or hard at all, but drowned in a sort of tenderness . . . Ah! what a night followed that dreadful moment! . . . and still . . . and still, I dream of it and wake shaking and crying!"

Deodato caught her in his arms with a joyous cry. "Ludovica, Ludovica! say no more! I will never doubt you again. You have shown me your soul . . . Oh! fool that I have been! . . . But you were then still free to tell your husband."

"I carried my trouble to him the next morning, hoping for sympathy, hoping for help . . . I had deceived myself."

"Ah!" Deodato struck his hand on the bench with a savage movement. "He was ready to accept the horns . . . as an imperial gift?"

"Not quite. He is more subtle than that . . . my husband. I watched his face grow harder and harder as I finished my tale; you

know those lines that run from his nostrils to his mouth, I have never seen them more like knife-cuts, and those shields over his eyes—they were like steel. At the end, 'You have been very imprudent, *Mme. la Duchesse*,' he said. 'Imprudent, Pierre?' I cried. 'Evidently. A man, a gentleman more especially, a Prince most of all, will not permit himself such liberties with a married woman unless he has received . . . how shall I put it? . . . some indication that they will not be resented.' I cried out in anger, and he told me sharply to calm myself. 'I do not suggest,' he went on, 'that you have been guilty of positive impropriety; I have sufficient respect for the name of Richard to act at once if I suspected that! But lightness is one thing, imprudence another. It rests with you now to convey to his Imperial Majesty that you are not among the women who are honoured by such attentions from him. Let *him* now learn that you are a good Catholic, with the most rigid ideas on the sanctity of the marriage-bond.' Yes, Deodato, he dared to taunt me thus with my complaints about his infidelities!"

"I can see his cat's-eyes gleaming—ah! the beast of prey!"

"I told him it was impossible for me to remain at Court. 'Let me tell you,' he answered, 'that flight would be taken by *tout Paris* as confession. It is out of the question . . . I do not propose to have my career broken through the childish *maladresse* of my wife. Has not your influence with the Emperor proved useful to Italy? Why sacrifice that too? Keep Napoleon at arm's length, no further, no nearer—at your peril! Every woman knows how to do that with a lover, even a crowned one.' Then I understood. My honour, my virtue . . . cards in his career! I must suffer, while he turned a blind eye to my sufferings. I must build steps to fresh honours for him out of my shame, my tears, my outraging . . . Only I must not be found out. The honour of the Smolensk . . . the name of Richard . . . prohibited *that* . . . Then I would be punished . . . for my carelessness. Ah! Deodato, my love, my love, can you wonder that the day you met me in the forest of Fontainebleau I was trying to make my horse carry me to my death? I had just met the Emperor in a lonely glade, and he had actually tried to detain me by force with his hand on my bridle!"

"You could have refused ever to be alone with him!"

"And Italy? . . . Most days I thought Naples or Rome were worth my torments, intolerable as they were."

"But Smolensk? Did he know the secret meetings continued after your oath?"

"He knew, but he would not see. I am sure of it. That evening in the Palace of Fontainebleau, for example, about which you challenged me . . . he must have been aware . . . Then—this is what I have never forgiven him—when disaster came and scandal threatened, he took advantage of the spy Dubonnet's allegations to shoot *you* . . . and 'save his honour,' so he phrased it!"

"He used the words to me, when I lay helpless on the floor," mused Deodato . . . "Ludovica, how did you ever let yourself marry such a ruffian?"

"I never loved him. He felt my coldness from our bridal-night. It was the beginning of our dislike of one another. I was tricked into the marriage . . . by Cavour. But I know he only sacrificed me, as he would have himself, on the altar of Italy."

"Ludovica!" Deodato seized her where she knelt and drew her to his breast. "It is time those ancient idols ceased to claim their holocausts! Life is strangled, while statesmen plot, and peoples cut each other's throats for hollow phrases."

"That is my thought, too, beloved! That is why I have deliberately forsworn myself, renounced my past, my honour and my family, that I might be . . . just a woman who belongs to you. Besides," she added inconsequentially, "my work for Italy is done. Rome will drop like a golden apple into the hands of my King, now the French Corps of Occupation has left the city for ever. It had been well for Louis Napoleon to have withdrawn them sooner." She turned her head again with the same embittered resentment towards the sound of the guns. "He has not a man to spare, has he, on the plateau?"

Deodato listened, too. The sound continued, but it grew no louder. The enemy could not be advancing: he was glad of that.

Ludovica seized his face in her hands, and turned it towards herself with imperious authority. "Listen!" she whispered. "You must not go back to the regiment. This war is no quarrel of yours. You are not French, nor am I. I shall take you away, Deodato. I will find you civil clothes . . . my gardener's. The way is still open to the north. As soon as night comes, we will escape . . . find a carriage at Rozerieulles or Chatel . . . gain Luxemburg . . . and then go home, home to Italy and peace . . . peace under the sky of Rome!"

"You have stayed with your husband all these bitter years?"

You would leave him now, when he is offering his life for his Emperor?"

"Words . . . words . . . Deodato! Pierre-Clément Richard has been for years only my gaoler."

Her passionate voice, searching out his entrails, brought to Deodato an almost irresistible temptation. The sky of Rome, of which she had reminded him! . . . The peace of the Basilicas . . . the somnolent enchantment of the Pamfili Gardens. The allure-ment was overpowering. He, after all, was by vocation an artist, not a soldier, a creator of life, not a destroyer of God's image. He was not, as she had said, a Frenchman . . . and as for the Empire—since he had seen Napoleon's departure this morning, he felt that the Empire was on the ground. It would take more than his arm to raise it again. France might yet be victorious, but not Louis Napoleon. . . . Ah! to see no more horrors! No more torn and suffering men! No more butchered, dumbly-reproachful horses! To have life, peace, sunshine . . . no treasure but the golden hair of Ludovica to pour through his fingers . . . no claim on his devotion but her beauty, and the palpitating fire of her body to bathe his soul and senses in! And, as the vision deepened and seemed to suck his will-power from him, he heard his own voice as if it were a stranger's hoarsely saying, "No, no, Ludovica, I cannot. It is dishonour; I cannot!"

"But listen! listen to me, my beloved!" She was still on her knees, her head thrown back, her hair breaking like the sunrise from the cloud of black lace which she had swept away in an impatient gesture, her face uplifted to his, the small mouth quivering with the very agony of Bernini's statue, her enthralling hands clasped in prayer over her bosom. "Listen! There is something inside me which tells me with a certainty greater than any I have ever known, that this is our last chance! . . . That if you refuse me now we shall never be happy! . . . Oh, Deodato, can you refuse me, whose whole life has been thwarted, wasted, perverted? I have always been the tool of others, always the one to be sacrificed, never been allowed to love, to laugh, to stretch myself upon the grass under the sky of Italy, to smell the flowers and take their life into mine. Always at every turn in my path, duty! Always chilling every pleasure, responsibility! Always shadowing every landscape, the Cause! Deodato, I ask you to give me the things I have never had. . . . I have never asked them from anyone before . . . because no

one before has ever loved me for myself. You're not going to refuse me them, are you ? "

Deodato, gazing at her with the thought of Rome still in his mind, marvelled at the contrast between her passion-wasted face to-day with the enormous, tragic eyes, and the sunny serenity of the girl who had walked to meet him in the chapel of the Beata in San Francesco a Ripa twelve years ago. How life had stripped her of her armour ! But the blows of destiny had not deadened her ; they had been like the rod of Moses striking the rock and causing the waters to flow forth. They had unsealed the hidden founts in her being, making her now, in the mingled weakness and strength of her aroused and wounded nature, a hundredfold more potent, more desirable !

(2)

In a torment of perplexity he rose from his seat and paced along the gravel-path, the furrow in the middle of his brows bulging, till he turned the corner of the house and found himself fronting the iron gates of the villa. Staring through them, and supporting himself with one hand against the wrought bars, was a soldier. It was a Grenadier, with the white facings of his tunic torn and his other hand wrapped in a bloody rag. As Deodato approached him, he saw that he was an old soldier, with hollow, high-boned cheeks, and a fierce moustache over his greying beard.

" *Dis donc, copain . . . quelque chose à boire ?* " he croaked. " Anything to drink, old fellow ? "

Deodato turned to Ludovica, who had followed him and now, with a nod, hurried into the house.

" Come inside and rest," said Deodato, opening the gates for him. " You are wounded ? "

The veteran carefully picked up his chassépot, which he had rested for a moment against the square, white pillar of the gate, and limped inside.

" Right in the back of this hand," he said, extending the bandaged member. " So I'm no use just now. Can't fire or fix bayonet ! But I can still march. So ' March,' said the Major, ' into Metz ! The field ambulances are full of worse cases than you.' That's true enough . . . I thank you." Deodato had rolled him a cigarette. " Yes," he continued, sitting on the ledge of the low wall by the

gate, "there's plenty of good fellows had their packet to-day. But I may tell you, *copain*, at my age a man is good really for fighting and not for marching." He grinned.

"You can rest here," repeated Deodato.

The Grenadier looked at him curiously, shading his eyes against the sunset glare, which was beginning to pour from the west into the garden. "You speak like an officer," he said gruffly. "But you're not, are you, Monsieur?"

"No," answered Deodato, "a volunteer."

"*Ah ! bah !*" said the old man, impressed. "Let me tell you, you've done well, Monsieur!"

Ludovica at that moment appeared with a bottle of wine and glasses, but hesitated, on seeing the veteran's wounded hand. "You should drink water only, Grenadier," she warned him.

"*Mais non, Madame, mais non !*" he protested ruefully. "What use is water to an old stomach like mine? I drank my litre at Sebastopol when I had a shot through my ankle, and at Solferino, though the Major forbade it . . . when I had a ball in the stomach . . . yes, in the stomach . . . and was I the worse for it? You can't kill a Grenadier with wine!" He reached out his hand with such a childish pleading that they had not the hardness to resist him.

"Ah! that puts some heart into a man," he said, wiping his moustaches. "This gentleman, Madame, tells me he has done his duty to the country . . . not like those d——d *moblots*, who refuse to fight for France. . . . It's pretty hot up there, you know, but we're holding them. . . . Ah! yes, we have them by the throat, the rascals! Five times they attacked the Guard by Rezonville, and we sent them back scurrying. Five infantry attacks, Monsieur, and then they sent their cavalry at us . . . pure loss! I hardly counted that an attack. They can't break the Guard, I tell you. To-night we'll throw 'em into the Moselle!"

"Please God!" murmured Deodato.

"Eh? But it's not a hope, it's a fact!" insisted the old man, turning his face with its mixture of ferocity and innocence towards Deodato. "And they deserve it too! I'll tell you what, Monsieur," he continued, his tongue loosening as he poured out glass after glass of the *vin rosé* of the country, "I'm a soldier, that's my *métier*, and I can respect the soldiers on the other side; it's their job too. *Sale métier!* a rotten job for an old man like me," he shook his head; "and for a good many of them, too, I don't doubt, poor

devils! But I will say this. What the devil do they come into France for, burning, plundering, killing our boys and our cattle? . . . You know, that's the life of the countryman, his beasts! France never threatened them or their farms. I'll fight where I'm sent . . . that's my job. But, what the devil! Let our poor peasants of France live and have their little pieces of ground. I'm a Frenchman and I know what I'm saying!"

Deodato could hardly help smiling at the old *soudard's* muddled philosophy; but the soldier's words woke in him a fresh resentment at the thought of the soil of France being trampled, and her happy, humane life destroyed by the implacable war-machine whose engineers had so skilfully chosen the favourable moment to release it on its career of devastation. He remembered the closed, sly faces of the Prussian Three in their clerical-looking attire under the great cannon at the Exhibition with an access of loathing.

"*Avec ça*"; the Grenadier rose stiffly to his feet, setting down the empty bottle, "I don't quarrel about the rights and wrongs of any war. My place is with the eagles. We had a fight for ours, *tonnerre de Dieu!* Three officers shot down bearing it, but it always came aloft again. This hand of mine was smashed by a ball from one of those *gredins* while kneeling under the very folds of the flag. . . . But, you see, Monsieur, the eagle, I have grown up under its wings: it has nourished me, that's what I always say; and the boys and I will be found standing or dying round the eagle while we can hold a rifle. The Empire nourished us, and we don't desert the Empire in the hour of trouble . . . like those d——d reservists who ran away at the first shot . . . like hares I saw them running this morning . . . *tas de salauds!* But you, you're a gentleman, M'sieu, and you won't run! To-day, no doubt, we're equals, wearing the same uniform . . . but I knew at once you were a gentleman. *Eh bien, M'sieu,* I ask leave to shake your hand . . . and that's more than I'd do for those *moblots* who threw mud at a Marshal of France . . . or those d——d, white-livered reservists either!"

"Thank you, Grenadier," said Deodato in a choked voice. "I . . . I am honoured if you take my hand."

"*Bon camarade, eh?*" The veteran grinned with his rare fangs, and crushed Deodato's fingers in his gnarled fist. "We stand shoulder to shoulder, all of us, in this don't we? *Bonsoir, Madame . . . Bonsoir, M'sieu!*"

The gate clanged behind him, and Deodato turned with a hopeless gesture to Ludovica. "Now do you understand?" he asked. "That is the man I must not betray!"

At that moment Annette, the Lorraine maidservant whom Ludovica had left to watch by the General's bedside, appeared in the garden looking for her mistress. The old gentleman, she reported, had come to himself, and, after asking vainly for his valet and cook, who had vanished in the turmoil of Gravelotte, was now fretting for news of the battle.

Ludovica ran up to the sick-room, and in a minute or two Deodato was sent for.

"It was you, they tell me," General Sertigues murmured, "who brought me off the field at great risk to yourself. *Merci, M. Caprano, merci!* I knew your uncle well."

"It was only my duty, General," Deodato assured him.

Sertigues turned his head, wincing with pain, to Ludovica, who stood on the other side of the bed. "You know, Madame, I was at sabre-play with four of their Hussars. I believe I accounted for two before they rode me down . . . my horse stumbled, you know . . . unlucky brute!"

He stopped and fell into a kind of hebetude, staring vacantly at the wall opposite.

Deodato leaned forward and asked him gently. "You have orders for me, my General?" He was longing for leave to return to the field, where, despite the approach of evening, the Grenadiers and the little peasant conscripts and his old companions of the Empress's Dragoons were still fighting for the Empire and for France, as the continued mutter and rumble of the cannonade proved.

The General came to himself with a little start. "Yes, yes, my boy, go and get information. Bring me back information! . . . What will the Division be doing without me? What will they do without me? . . . And, M. Caprano, see, if you can, that my van is in a place of security!"

Deodato hurried from the room before the order should be recalled, and sought his horse, still standing saddled with loose girths in the stable of the villa.

There Ludovica came after him, and insisted on readjusting his bandage, so that he could wear his tunic more easily.

"It's only a graze," he assured her. "Provided that my other arm and shoulder hold out!"

"Deodato!" she asked, "you are going back . . . back into danger?"

"Perhaps. . . . Do not try to stop me, I beg of you!"

"I will not . . . never again . . . never again, my love." She smiled with a proud pathos. "I have only once in my life put myself first . . . and that was half an hour ago. That can be forgiven, can it not, by God and by you, Deodato?"

He caught her hand to his lips: "There is nothing for me to forgive, Ludovica!"

"Promise me only this—that you will come back, here, as soon as your duty allows!"

"I shall come back to-night. It is my duty to report to the General. I am his *porte-fanion*."

"To-night!" A sudden, soft light transfigured her face. "Then come back quickly! I know God will bring you back safe to me, but come quickly! I shall be waiting for you."

(3)

He mounted, and rode back towards Gravelotte in the deepening twilight. The approach of night had evidently not yet stopped the fighting, for still the untiring cannon grumbled and in spasms bellowed. By the farm of St. Hubert he met fresh ambulance-trains following those he had heard jolting past the villa at intervals all the afternoon. The ravine of the Mance when he reached it was already drowned in shadow, a black gulf through which a thread of water wound with a steely gleam, while the trees fringing it seemed to lean over to listen, with a strange expectancy. Then, as he mounted towards Gravelotte, the way became crowded again, and on the outskirts of the village he was amazed at the mass of troops he found collected there. Not only was the road loaded with marching columns; all the fields beside it were packed with advancing or halted infantry, a forest of bayonet-points that glimmered as far as he could see in every direction through the solemnly gathering night.

His progress was necessarily checked, and he took the opportunity to ask here and there where he might find the 4th Reserve Cavalry Division; but none of these new troops from whom he enquired could tell him anything. They seemed to be for the most part

regiments of the Third Corps, swung over from the French centre to stiffen and thicken the left at Gravelotte for some strategic purpose.

All those he spoke to, privates or corporals, and an officer who (recognizing a gentleman volunteer) spoke to him, had the same tale to tell. The Prussian attacks had been fought to a standstill. Their infantry were worn down; their cavalry shattered by reckless charges; and only their superior artillery, which everyone admitted, enabled them to hold on to the ruins of Vionville and the woods and ridges south of Mars-la-Tour. "What of the mitrailleuses, *mon Lieutenant*?" enquired Deodato. "A disappointment," confessed the officer. "They are the arm of the future, don't doubt it! But we have not yet learnt the right way to use them."

The Commander-in-Chief, the officer opined, was massing these fresh troops for a resolute offensive to drive the enemy back down the ravines upon Gorze and into the Moselle. "But it is dark now, *mon Lieutenant*," Deodato objected. "*N'importe*," said the officer sturdily, "we shall start again to-morrow morning then. We hold them, I assure you."

Everywhere Deodato felt this same confidence and hopefulness, as he passed on, traversed the street of Gravelotte, encumbered with ambulances, and with every house an improvised hospital from which, by the light of feeble lamps, came dreadful sights and sounds, and took the switchbacking road to Rezonville. In the dark it showed up as a vast furnace, smoke and flame rolling round the damaged tower of the church, which stood out black against the flickering background. Overhead the battle-cloud hung, choking, sulphurous, sultry; a twisting fog that opened in rents beyond the village to show tremulous stars in a distant vault.

As Deodato breasted the last slope leading into Rezonville the German artillery broke forth in the most terrific burst of sound he had heard that day, and was answered from the hidden ridges round the place with crackling rifle-fire, the jarring of mitrailleuses and the booming thud of a French battery somewhere out of sight to the front of the village. It was as though the final flare-up of the conflict was proving the most furious.

By the first houses of Rezonville he was met by what looked like a dragging procession of ghosts. As they drew nearer he saw that they were Prussian Cuirassier prisoners in white tunics and silver breast-plates, many of them unhelmeted and wounded . . . he had

not yet heard of the "death-ride" of von Bredow's Brigade against Canrobert's guns, of which this was the heroic debris.

Then, to his relief, he came suddenly upon Delangle and the Staff of the 4th Cavalry Division under the wall of the same barn where they had stopped that morning, dismounted, and trying to make a supper from sandwiches and flasks. He told the Colonel of General Sertigues' recovery and thirst for news.

"You may tell the General it is not too bad," said Delangle cautiously. "We hold them, I think. . . . Anyhow, we start again to-morrow from where we stand."

"But, Colonel," expostulated the other officers of the Staff, "it is a victory! *Allons, donc!*"

"It would have been," answered Delangle, "if Ladmirault had enveloped their left flank and rolled them off the Verdun road. But he was too late. It was over there these reserves would have made their weight felt decisively. However, we can begin again to-morrow."

He turned to Deodato and gave him a scribbled report to take back to the General. "Reassure him!" he said as he pencilled it on the top of a farm-wall by the dancing light of the conflagration in the village.

The other officers, meanwhile, were arguing among themselves. "I tell you it is a victory . . . a decisive victory!" insisted the optimist. "You know what the Marshal will call himself after to-morrow? Duke of Rezonville! That will be his title—Duke of Rezonville!"

"He has all the luck—Bazaine!" said another voice enviously.

Deodato turned and began his journey back in good heart.

CHAPTER FOUR

MOSCOW

(I)

HOW paradisaical the villa, with its soft lamps streaming out through the window-curtains, and the scent of its flowers coming up from the dewy garden, seemed to him when, after the weary ride back, he dismounted from his tired horse at the gates!

The place was very still, as he led his horse to the stable and searched for some oats in a bin. The General's two servants with his landau had long since gone off to seek quarters in the hamlet of Jussy; over his head in the stable he could hear the snores of the gardener, who slept in the loft; in General Sertigues' window a candle was glimmering.

At the door of the house, when he softly approached it, Ludovica met him with a finger on her lips. In the rays from the china lamp on the hall-table she wore a curious, almost ecstatic, look of happiness. Her eyes were starry, her lips smiled; and though she had replaced the veil of black lace over her hair, she had pinned to her breast a spray of the crimson geraniums from the garden, as if in challenging token of joy.

"You are back!" she whispered. "Did I say God would send you back to me? I have not worried over your delay. Listen! The old man sleeps; he is much better, out of danger; and it is best he should not be wakened. I have made an arrangement with Annette. I am to watch by the General till two, and she will take her turn till six. Go first to the kitchen; there is food prepared for you there. Then creep down to the stable . . . quietly, quietly . . . though Jean sleeps like a dog! Sleep yourself for a few hours. At two I will come to you . . . we will go out into the woods, and, my beloved," she breathed, "we will see the dawn of the new day break together!"

From one of the distant village churches, Deodato, who had just

woken from his sleep in the white Chasseur mantle he had found rolled on the saddle of the horse he had annexed from the battlefield, heard the hour of two fall into the stillness of the brilliant summer night of stars. Very soon he heard the lightest stirring of gravel under a foot, and creeping to the stable-door saw Ludovica outside. "Take your cloak and come!" she whispered.

Without question, and feeling almost hypnotised by the tranquillity of the star-lit night, he followed her down the garden and out through the iron gates. After closing these softly behind her, she slipped her arm through his and, with a confident step, as though knowing well where she was going, led him across the glimmering ribbon of the road towards the heathy slopes mounting on the opposite side.

The stillness was amazing, the solitude incredible. It was another of the weird transformation-scenes of warfare. The traffic of pain on the road into Metz had suffered a temporary pause, and on the slopes towards Saint-Hubert not a bivouac, not a sentinel, not a vedette was in sight. Only a vibrant red glow in the sky over the crests indicated the camp-fires of the French army round Gravelotte.

For a few minutes after crossing the road they had to skirt the ill-smelling relics of a camping-ground vacated the morning before; but soon they moved through an untouched nightscape of undulating flats and masses of bush. A chilly wind blew across this high edge of the plateau, and Ludovica shivered a little as she drew her lace veil closer round her shoulders. Deodato shook out the long folds of his horseman's mantle, and, wrapping them round her, drew her to him and held her fast, feeling her heart beat against his side. So they walked on interlaced, lifting their faces to the refreshment of the cool night wind, which seemed to Deodato to do something to clear from his mind the hideous, inflamed images of death and mutilation that had wearied his eyes all day. His strained nerves began to relax in the peace of the night, in the soothing sense of Ludovica's body, with its warmth and coiled energy, pressed against his own.

For a long time neither spoke; their only movement was to clasp hands under his cloak, and in this clasp fresh currents of love seemed to link them still more rapturously together. At length, Deodato, gazing up at the stars, asked, "What does this remind you of, Ludovica? . . . Nothing? . . . Well, for me, I might be on the Roman campagna to-night. . . . These stars in a velvet sky . . . those

barren sweeps on every side ! It gives me the blessed delusion that I have come home . . . home to peace and beauty and my task of creation . . . How empty, how sickening to the soul is this duty of destruction ! War is an accursed thing . . . I have ever suspected it . . . now I know it. Yes, at this moment, I walk in a dream, from which I could pray never to be awakened. And my dream is that I am back home again, on the campagna . . . and that San Sebastiano is perhaps down in the hollow yonder behind that white wall ! ”

Ludovica let her head fall on his shoulder. “ But it is not a dream, beloved ; for me it is no dream,” she murmured. “ I *am* come home, to my true *patria*, here on your shoulder . . . here in your clasp . . . and I have brought you up here, to the solitude under God’s heaven, to heal your wounds . . . the wounds of your soul . . . not with dreams, but with the reality of love ! ”

Her voice had sunk to a whisper ; he felt her soft breath on his cheek. Her face was turned up to his, a pale oval in which he could trace more by mental reading than by sight the arched brows, the broad ridge of the cheeks, and could discern a faint shimmer from the shadowed eyes.

The passage of some night-bird with whirring wings startled them for a moment, and they walked on a little while in silence. Then, as they reached the top of a swelling, the valley of the Moselle below opened up as though a dark cloak had been withdrawn, studded with the sparse nocturnal lights of Metz, the parallel lines of its bridges, the oblongs of its Places, the rosy glow of the watchfires along the black line of the nearer fortifications. Deodato suddenly felt Ludovica’s arms round his neck. “ Listen ! ” she whispered. “ You go back to-morrow into that hell, to fight again . . . it is your duty . . . I do not quarrel with it. But I will not consent to be wholly cheated by Life . . . To-night is ours, yours and mine . . . what may happen afterwards to me I do not care . . . not that ! ” She flicked her fingers.

“ If I live ”—he imprisoned her hand in the midst of her gesture, and drew her away from the wind-swept eminence towards the shelter of a long, low wood that made an inky curve cutting the star-curtain nearby—“ if I live, I will come back, I swear, and take you away from man or Devil ! ”

“ And if . . . Ah ! *Signore Dio*, how can I think of it ? . . . if you do not come back . . . do you think I will let you go with our love

unfulfilled and our lives frustrated? . . . No, no, Deodato! I am yours . . . yours *now*!"

She lay on his bosom in an ecstatic calm; through her parted lips he could hear her breath come sighing with content. . . . He knew that their marriage night was here.

But on the threshold of the wood, the last steps towards which he had carried her, realising that she could walk no more from the langorous way she wound her arm round his neck to help him lift her, on the threshold of the welcoming wood she gave a quiver and a cry, and let her feet slip to the ground. "Smolensk!" she gasped, "Smolensk!"

"What of him?" Deodato stopped, astonished.

"He is here! This moment he took my hand! . . . Yes, yes, I know his grip; he has a painful way of squeezing a hand he grasps! It could be no one else . . . no one else!"

"But he is not here, dear one! He could not be here! Reflect!"

"My hand was held . . . and by his," she repeated obstinately. "I know it!"

"Listen! Your hand was caught by some trailing withe that cut into it—some growth of the wood."

She stood for a minute without support, tensely listening, and bending forward as if she would search the copse in the dark with her short-sighted eyes. There was a close silence. Not a beast rustled in the undergrowth, not a bird fluttered on a bough. "He is gone," she murmured, "if he was here! . . . Deodato!"

She turned, and unfolded her arms for her lover.

(2)

It was close on four o'clock of the morning, and a grey and ghostly dawn glimmered over the plateau. Mist veils hung from bush to bush across the distances; the copses were still drowned in shadow; sullen red bars smouldered in the eastern sky above Metz, as Deodato and Ludovica stole back towards the villa. As they passed through a little wood approaching the main road, the ears of both were caught by the rhythm of marching feet. Deodato held up his hand to Ludovica to stay where she was, while he crept forward to the verge of the wood to see what was happening.

To his amazement the road was filled with columns of infantry—marching down the hill! While he stared at them, wondering what

manœuvre could be bringing them back here, withdrawing from the battlefield of yesterday, he heard the soft trampling and rustling of hoofs through grass, the clink of bits and scabbards, and slipping across to the other edge of the wood, beheld a long line of Cuirassiers, draped in their scarlet mantles, winding down across country, also in the direction of Metz. There was a crestfallen droop about their helmets; no singing or shouted jests rose from the files as they picked their way down the slope. Infantry and cavalry retiring this morning, instead of advancing! It was incredible! What could it possibly portend?

For the moment, however, the urgent thing was to warn Ludovica that their hope of getting back to the villa wholly unobserved before the sunrise had been thwarted. After a few minutes' hurried conference, they decided to separate, for fear of some more compromising encounter. She would return as quickly as possible to the house, and hope to escape notice stealing back to her locked bedroom; whence she would issue, as she had planned, in her *robe de chambre*, to relieve Annette from her watch by the General's bedside. Deodato had better wait a little longer, and make his own way back to the stables, avoiding the house by a field-path which she indicated to him.

He let her go, and stayed a long half-hour watching the continued flow of troops to the rear on the road two or three hundred yards distant. He longed to approach and try to learn something as they passed, but knew it would be imprudent. He was painfully struck by their silence and dejected bearing, like that of the cavalry. They had not the mien of troops hugging the secret of some triumphant strategem: they could not have shuffled and straggled along more dismally if they were retreating in defeat. The mournful thump of a single drum gave time to a regiment marching with closer discipline, and Deodato recognised the gold-barred tunics of the Voltigeurs of the Guard, dull in the depressing light. Their commanding-officer, riding alone, wrapped in a mantle, slashed savagely with his sword at the bushes and trees he passed. A cold gripe closed round Deodato's heart. Something had gone wrong. . . . Some disaster had happened . . . what could it be?

Whatever it was, he could not stay to discover now. He must get back to the house and his duty. Taking the opportunity of a long gap between two regiments of the Voltigeur Division, he slipped across the road, and ran, with boots and *basanes* soaked in the heavy

dew, along the path that let him in near the stables of the villa. He was too restless, however, to wait there long for a message from the house, and presently he emerged and approached the back door. As soon as he appeared on the path outside it, Annette, the Lorraine maid, ran out to meet him with reddened eyes.

"Ah! Chasseur!" she sobbed, "what fearful news! He is dead, you know?"

"Who is dead, Mademoiselle?"

"But the General, of course!"

Deodato recoiled. "My General dead! Impossible! I left him . . . it is not three hours since . . . out of all danger, and on the good way to recovery. . . . What will they say to me if I have let him die?"

"But it is not of your General at all that I am speaking, Chasseur! . . . The old one still sleeps soundly!"

"Then what General has died? Tell me, Annette, I beseech you!"

"*M. le Duc!* . . . My poor master!" Tears brimmed out of the girl's eyes again.

"Smolensk?"

"Killed in the battle . . . up yonder! His aide-de-camp brought the terrible news . . . oh! nearly an hour ago now. . . . He dismounted at the gate just as *Madame la Duchesse*, it appears, was entering . . . I did not know she had gone out walking so early, and in these dangerous times! . . . Imagine the shock it was for her, poor thing! Her husband, the officer told her, was killed last night outside Rezonville by one of the last shells fired in the battle. . . . His body lies in the church, in a coffin of boards knocked together by the village carpenter . . . think of it, the body of *M. le Duc!* . . . and they will have to leave him there, for the army is retreating. . . . The last shot fired in the battle! . . . He threw himself into needless danger. . . . He was always so brave! *Ah! comme c'est triste! Ah! pauvre Madame!* What is the matter with you, Chasseur? Are you ill?"

Deodato had reeled through the door, and collapsed on a chair in the scullery. This stroke after the strains and emotions of the last twenty-four hours was too much for his exhausted strength. For a moment everything turned green and misty; then, as he let his head fall forward, the rush of blood checked his faintness.

"Where is Madame?" he asked hoarsely.

"In her room . . . praying."

"And the officer who brought the news?"

"Madame sent him back at once with some message."

"Thank you, Annette!" Deodato turned and walked unsteadily out of the house. The girl called after him to stay and drink some coffee, but he did not hear her. He made his way to the harbour and sat down to measure the weight of the blow. Smolensk needed no pity from a fellow-soldier for his glorious end. His military loyalty and martial passion had been the best things in his perverted character; they had remained when so much else had been lost in the play of avarice and ambition. But Deodato dreaded terribly the effect of the blow on Ludovica. Would she not feel a desperate guilt at having been with a lover the night when her husband was lying freshly killed in a cold village church not a dozen miles away? Might not the vein of superstition in her nature, which had always shown itself in her attitude towards the hereditary relic of the Santacroces, now reassert itself with violence, making her loathe the man with whom she had sinned at such an hour? She might be overwhelmed by dread that already the penalty for her broken oath, her sacrilege towards the relic, was beginning to be exacted from her. How strange it had been that she should fancy in the wood that a clinging withe was the clutch of the dead man's hand. He had no such beliefs, but it gave him an eerie feeling to remember it just now. What could he say to console, to fortify her . . . ?"

And then there rose in his agonised mind, bearing down for the moment all other thoughts, the assertion of the Lorraine girl that the French Army was in retreat. It must be true . . . he had seen the troops on the march. But why? Why? What calamity had happened, to snatch the fruits of victory from them? Every misfortune seemed to be breaking at once on this dreadful morning!

"Deodato!"

It was Ludovica's voice, and he leapt up to meet her eyes, blurred and swollen with weeping.

"You know?" she said, "he is dead . . . while I was betraying him?"

"Ludovica," he pleaded, "do not use words that have no meaning in this case. Let us salute the Duke as a good soldier who did his duty, but do not let us forget—the manner of man he was! And do not, ah! do not forget, because you are shaken by this blow, that you belong to me now . . . that our nuptials were sealed last night in the wood!"

"In the wood!" she shuddered. "He snatched my hand in the wood. . . . I cried out to you when he did it, did I not?"

"You know, Ludovica, you *know* it was a trailing plant! Do not let your great soul be weakened by superstition at this moment . . . on which all may depend!"

"A trailing plant! Yes, a trailing plant that has wound itself around me and from which I shall never escape!"

"Ludovica, will you drive me mad? . . . Remember, you never loved him . . . you confessed it last night!"

"Loved him? Perhaps not." She began to sob quietly. "But there were hours of friendship, at first. . . . There were hopes it tears the heart to look back on now. So much I meant to do for him, as well as Italy! . . . And what was it I was doing at the last?"

"Then you repent?" he asked, in a shaking voice. "You mean to fly from me? . . . At least, put me out of my suspense, Ludovica!"

She quivered as if she had been struck, and a wonder came into her eyes that for the moment banished her grief. "You believed *that*?" she demanded incredulously. "You believed I would desert you . . . you, my beloved. Why, I have never in my life done anything, or refrained from anything, because I was frightened. . . . And God knows I have had hours of terror, too! . . . Understand me better, my love, *sposo mio* . . . my own, true husband—"

"Ah! my angel! Forgive me . . . I was mad to doubt. . . . But I was frightened. . . . Never again!" Sobbing with revulsion, he seized her in his arms.

For a moment she trembled passionately in his embrace; then gently disengaged herself. "Understand, also, Deodato," she said quietly, "that there is a price to be paid . . . a duty remaining to be done."

"A duty, dearest? What duty can be owing to a dead man?"

"My duty to his body! I must go to Rezonville to recover it."

"But that is impossible. Rezonville is in the hands of the enemy. The French Army is in retreat . . . God knows why!"

"That I know too. So I sent back the Duke's aide-de-camp, Captain Cléry, to try to arrange a safe-conduct for me to take charge of Pierre's body. The Prussians will not refuse it to his widow. They are Christians, and gentlemen. . . . Do not seek to dissuade me, dear, for this one thing I must do for him."

"Simply to bury him in Metz?"

"No. I must take him to Paris. He must lie in the mausoleum

of his family in Père-Lachaise. I know he valued the idea of sepulture with his parents. . . . I know the sums he spent to gild and embellish the monument. . . . He would never lie quiet in the obscurity of a country churchyard. He would come back to haunt me, as he did last night. It is the only thing I can do for him, and I will carry it out. I will beg his body of the Prussians, and take it to his family in Paris."

Deodato reflected. After all, she might be safest, since a siege of Metz now appeared to be a possibility, if she could obtain a pass to take her out of the zone of hostilities. "*Mon Dieu*," he murmured, "perhaps you have chosen the wisest course. There will be much business to attend to in Paris . . . the testament of the late Duke. . . ."

She made a violent gesture. "Not a *sou*! I will not touch a *sou* of the money of the Richards! He has relatives—a brother, two nieces; let them share my part! . . . I can arrange all that with a notary in Paris. Ah!" She gave a sigh of deep relief. "I am glad, in spite of all, that I can now cast off this last chain. Court, Empire, politics, title, money . . . all gone!"

"Except Life!" Deodato reminded her.

"Except Love!" she answered him.

Before they could embrace again there was a clatter and jingling at the gates of the villa, and Deodato hurried round the corner of the house in time to salute Colonel Delangle, who was just entering the gates, while Duroc, the Trumpeter and an escort of Chasseurs waited outside.

"What news of the General, Caprano?" the Colonel asked. "He is scarcely well enough, I suppose, to resume command?"

"Impossible, I fear, *mon Colonel*! Though he is much recovered, I am glad to tell you."

"He can see me? It is necessary to obtain his consent for the transference of the command. Marshal Bazaine has ordered that our Division is to be attached to Marshal Canrobert's Corps, which is retiring on Verneville. You need not stare at me like that!" he exploded. "I did not give the order for the retreat of the army."

"Pardon, *mon Colonel*!" murmured Deodato. "I will fetch the Duchess, if you wish, to take you to the General."

After a few words of greeting and condolence with Ludovica, Delangle, ordering Deodato to follow him, was shown into General Sertigues' sick-room.

He was awake, and nodded assent, though without much comprehension, to the arrangements Delangle communicated to him. He signed the transference of his command to his junior Brigadier (General Oncq being still *hors de combat*) with a wavering pencil, and sighed. "You find me brought very low, Delangle," he murmured, "very low. . . . I killed two of them, but three more of the rascals brought me down. . . . To be so very helpless now . . . I, a General, and Marquis of the Empire. . . . But *Madame la Duchesse* has been very good to me, very good."

"If I may presume to advise you, General," said Delangle, "I would urge you, so soon as you can bear the journey, to drive into Metz to finish your convalescence. I fear there may be fighting at Jussy soon."

"Then we are driving them back over the Moselle, eh? . . . I knew we should! A great man, *M. le Maréchal Bazaine*!"

Delangle said nothing to undeceive him, but took his leave, after obtaining permission for the *porte-fanion* to go with him to the reformed Divisional Staff.

"Certainly—certainly, a soldier's place is with the colours! . . . But I wish just one word with M. Caprano before he goes . . . a last matter of service!"

Left alone with Deodato, he lifted himself on his elbow with difficulty, and asked, in a voice of tremulous anxiety: "Tell me, my child, tell me the truth! You were out there last night, were you not? Well, did you see anything, hear anything of my wagon . . . my *cabinet*?"

Deodato judged it a moment for bold lying. "It is safe, *mon Général*!" he declared. "And I hope it will meet you in Metz!"

General Sertigues de Messimy sank back on his pillows with a look of infinite relief. "That is good! That is very good! You are an understanding boy! . . . I shall be glad to have you attached to my Staff in the next war, too! . . . You know how very hard it is on the field of battle . . . when one is no longer young . . . and when one's stomach is no longer strong!"

(3)

As Deodato started up the road, riding as *estafette* a horse's length behind Colonel Delangle, with the Trumpeter Duroc and the rest of

the escort following, he turned twice in his saddle to look back. Outside the gates of the villa he saw the black figure of Ludovica standing motionless and watching. Then the road made an angle, and she disappeared.

Deodato turned his attention to his surroundings. Their little troop was battling upwards against a torrent of infantry flowing to meet them with a dispirited look and slouching step. First there was a battalion on one side of them, and then a second on the other, equally grim and glum; Deodato could guess the caustic remarks that were being grunted from mouth to mouth, though he could not hear them. As they approached Saint-Hubert battery after battery of artillery, clanking and jolting, disputed the causeway, while along the fields to the right of the road Lancers and Hussars jogged past with the same bored, lifeless look, slumping in their saddles.

Over the tree-tops on the farther side of the Mance ravine pillars of thick, black smoke eddied with a gyratory motion against the faint blue of the dawn. "They are burning stores, to keep the Prussians hungry," explained a Dragoon, trotting by. "Thousands of rations—salt, sugar, biscuit . . . I don't know what . . . I could do with a mouthful!"

Delangle gave a curt order, and the Chasseurs left the highway close to the old grey walls and firs of Saint-Hubert farm, and began to canter across the open fields just below the crest of the ridge. Presently, they fell into a trot, and Delangle summoned Deodato to his side. "Do you know anything of this country, Caprano?" he asked in a friendly tone. "No more than I do, I suppose. Well, I gather the army is falling back on a series of positions along this ridge, covering Metz, with the forts at the back of us there. Saint-Hubert. . . Verneville . . . Amanvilliers is the line, but I wish I had a map. You couldn't get one for love or money in Metz, and the only maps served out to the Staff were of Germany. . . . A little bit optimistic! . . . Luckily I passed some hours last night shivering in a bivouac beside a gunner who had been in the Metz Artillery School. He tried to get the lie of the country and some landmarks into my head . . . but what a maze it is just here! Hills, woods, ravines, no visibility beyond a few thousand metres! *Enfin!* We must muddle through as best we can."

In a few minutes there rose into view another long, grey-walled farmhouse, with a red roof. Delangle reined in and studied it through his monocle. "Yes," he said, "that should be the first of the

places my gunner friend indicated as a good supporting-point for our line. That is Moscow."

"*Moscow!*" Deodato gave such a start that his horse jibbed and pranced.

"What's the matter?" Delangle eyed him curiously. "It's an odd name for a farm, I know. And it seems there's another one a little farther along this ridge with the name Leipzig. It's quite simple really. This land was bought by an ex-officer of Napoleon I, who amused himself by giving the names of his old battles to his farms. . . . What is the matter, Caprano? You look as if you had been scared by a ghost! I don't see anything. . . ."

"*Pardon, mon Colonel,*" Deodato murmured. "And . . . after Leipzig . . . what?"

"*La Folie.* Then Verneville, I hope. That's where Marshal Canrobert ordered us to assemble."

"Colonel," said Deodato abruptly, "may I ask a question? What is the reason of this retreat? Why didn't we attack the enemy this morning—he was beaten—and continue our march to Verdun?"

"Shortage of munitions, lack of supplies. That was Marshal Bazaine's explanation to the Corps Commanders," answered Delangle shortly.

"Lack of supplies? But, Colonel, we saw . . . you saw, surely . . . thousands of rations being burnt . . . the smoke was going up to heaven in columns like Italian pine-trees!"

"It is possible," said Delangle hesitatingly, "that the Commander-in-Chief did not feel it safe, after all, to be cut off from Metz."

"Stay at Metz! But then——"

"That will do, Caprano. One does not discuss one's Chiefs! You can fall back."

Deodato found himself by the side of Duroc the Trumpeter, who grinned recognition. "*Eh, bien, mon bourgeois?*"

"Tell me, Duroc," asked Deodato in a low voice. "Do you think it true that we have fallen back through shortage of munitions . . . and rations?"

Duroc laughed and sang a paraphrase of one of the songs from "The Grand Duchess":

" 'Yes, that is what the Marshal says,
Yes, that is what the Marshal says,
We have no shots, we have no food.' "

He broke off, and with a defiant look at Deodato, declared,

"*Bazaine, c'est un cochon, entendez-vous ?*"

Deodato stared at him aghast. His voice sounded thick as if he had been refreshing himself with the plenteous wine of the country. Still! "*Bazaine is a swine!*" It was the first time he had heard a soldier say anything against the Commander-in-Chief. Till this morning everything and everyone else had been to blame. The Emperor was a *fuyard*, a "quitter." Marshal Lebœuf with his elegantly-curled white coiffure was a *mannequin*, a tailor's dummy. Frossard was *un pion*, a "d——d school-usher" . . . but "the glorious Bazaine"—no one before had criticised him!

"Bazaine a swine!" Deodato revolted against the idea as though hit by a lash. It was untrue! It was absurd! Bazaine was a real Chief, always cool, well-informed, master of the situation. For sure, he had a plan, a big plan maturing behind that brooding Chinese mask of his, and this disconcerting retreat was part of it. . . . *Allons donc!* One did not become a Marshal of France by being an idiot! Private Caprano rebuked the Trumpeter Duroc, to his huge surprise, in the tones of a Guard officer.

They had passed Leipzig; they had passed La Folie. Now a road opened that showed below them a good-sized village with a spire. A peasant, struggling valiantly to get in his sheaves, suspiciously conceded to enquiry that it might be Verneville. As they approached, an *estafette* came trotting up the lane. Delangle stopped him. "Sixth Corps d'Armée—where?"

"Marshal Canrobert? He's gone, *mon Colonel*. I am from the Fourth Corps, General Ladmirault, at Amanvilliers."

"Then, where is the Marshal?"

"He has gone on to occupy Saint-Privat, extreme right of the line. Over yonder, *mon Colonel!*" The orderly pointed vaguely to the north-east over the delusive distance of rising and falling crests, curving and dipping woods. "You'll see the church-spire."

"Every tiny hamlet has a church-spire in these parts," grumbled Delangle, turning his horse. They moved for a while in an easterly direction, then found themselves abruptly halted on the lip of a narrow, wooded valley with precipitous sides. Looking down, they saw that it was packed from edge to edge with cavalry, apparently preparing to camp. "What in God's name are they doing down there?" murmured Delangle. "They can't reconnoitre!

They can't manoeuvre! If even one Prussian battery were to get their range——"

"*Ça serait du propre, mon Colonel!*" answered the Trumpeter Duroc impudently. "A grand salad!"

"Hold your tongue, Trumpeter!" snapped the Colonel; then, following Deodato's pointing finger, he gazed upwards and gave an exclamation.

High above the verdant corridor where the cavalry of the army was boxed in, a mighty hillside ascended, clothed with vines and little trees, till the gleam of stone revetments at the summit disclosed that it was the scarp of Fort Saint-Quentin. And all along the upper parts of this eminence canvas shone and picket-lines were traced on a slope so steep that it was a marvel tents and animals did not slide into the valley. Delangle gazed up through his field-glasses. "It must be the Guard," he said. "I swear I saw Voltigeur facings." He gave a short laugh. "They're well on the shelf, out of mischief! What's the idea?"

Again Deodato pointed—higher still. At the top of all, beside the Fort, where for a certain space the bare ridge of the hill emerged from the trees and scrub, there appeared in black outline against the now palpitating mid-day sky the pontoon-train that two days ago had been obstructing the road to Gravelotte, climbing up and up towards Heaven with the look of flat-backed insects, and seeking apparently to throw a viaduct to Valhalla or bridge the waters of the firmament.

Duroc uttered a wild cheer. "*Ohé, les canotiers!*" he shouted. "Good rowing!"

The Colonel eyed him with disgust. No doubt now about his having looked on the wine of the country! But "no punishments" had too long been the generous but fatal instruction given to the Army of the Rhine. Delangle shrugged his shoulders and led the way north along the edge of the ravine.

It was nearly sunset when, after passing through Amanvilliers, the Chasseurs saw before them on a lonely crest rising wave-like from the plateau of yesterday's fighting a cluster of melancholy grey houses with a steeple. It was the village of Saint-Privat—the end of the journey.

CHAPTER FIVE
SAINT-PRIVAT

(I)

ANOTHER August sun drank up the dews and flamed into the hard blue sky, and once more through the sweltering mid-day hours the smoke of battle wrapped the ridges, the roar of battle rebounded from the hills. At right angles now to the Verdun road for which they had fruitlessly spilt their blood two days ago the French lay on the spine that covers Metz to the west. From the abrupt side of the Mance ravine, past grey Saint-Hubert to the red-tiled roofs of Moscow and Leipzig on the crest ; thence through Amanvilliers to where the high ground gently sloped to meet the plain by dour Saint-Privat, their line extended, ardent and indomitable. On the rim of the steep ravine Frossard the engineer came at last into his own ; from his trenches and abattis of felled trees chassepot and mitrailleuse broke up the waves of storming Prussian infantry, choking the wooded gulf with blue-clad corpses, turning the glint of the Mance to crimson. Along the ridge from Saint-Hubert to Amanvilliers Lebœuf, the gunner, and Ladmirault to-day proved their mettle, finding the range at which the French artillery could act, shattering the Prussian batteries, withering the infantry attacks.

The long line smoked and thundered, while, behind, upon the glacis of Saint-Quentin the Guard stood listening, fretful and impatient, waiting the word to throw their disciplined, incomparable strength into the scale. The noon-tide rays shot vertically down through rolling, sulphurous banks upon the farms in flames, the yelling, sweating combatants, while underneath the glacis of Saint-Quentin's twin, Fort Plappeville, the French Commander sat inside a tiny villa, secluded, inaccessible, replacing by mysterious inactivity his feverish gallopings at Rezonville.

Canrobert, meanwhile, peering from the walled orchard of a house upon the verge of Saint-Privat, sees through the shimmering heat

upon the plain at mid-day dark, creeping lines of hostile columns feeling out to turn his flank. A stream of messengers, scouts, *estafettes*, dwellers in the villages below, have brought him in the last two hours news of the heavy forces being massed against him. Here, on the extreme right of the French Army's position, the ground lies open, un-intrenched, merging by easy sweeps of grass in the plateau beneath. Here the old soldier, turning his head from side to side beneath the white sun-cloth hanging from his képi at the back, knows the vulnerable point to lie, and anxious forebodings steal into his thoughts. Saint-Privat itself has been made a fortress—the garden-walls crenelated, the houses loop-holed and strengthened, sharp-shooters posted even on the roofs. But, beyond, his right is "in the air"; he has had neither time nor tools to dig himself in. And already the guns of the Prussian Guard pound the village from the plain; his outposts are hotly pressed in the hamlets at the foot of the slope; his batteries along the summit are feeling the effects of an unequal artillery duel.

To him, alone in the orchard (for he has bidden his Staff wait in a more sheltered position at the further end of the village) comes the Brigadier now commanding the 4th Cavalry Division, with Colonel Delangle and his orderly, Caprano, who holds all three horses as they dismount. "*Non, non, non!*" Deodato presently heard the Marshal's high, cracked voice exclaim in answer to a question from the Brigadier. "I do not want you yet! *F . . . d'un f . . . !* this is not a cavalry job! But have you an officer with a good horse here?"

"Colonel Delangle is the best-mounted man on my Staff," answered the Brigadier enviously.

"Delangle? Good! Take your glass, Colonel, and look down there! The whole plain, you see, is swarming with the enemy. They have sent the Prussian Guard itself, it seems, to turn me out . . . together with the Army Corps of Saxony! Much honoured, Messieurs!"

As he spoke a shell exploded near the wall behind which he stood, throwing up dirt and bespattering them all. He pursued his train of thought undisturbed. "Listen, Delangle! It's my belief they are moving to envelop my right by Roncourt yonder. I've no entrenching tools up here, but those *gredins* must be stopped at all costs! The safety of the whole Army depends on it. If they crumple my flank, the line is turned from Saint-Hubert to here! . . .

But I've not the men, nor the guns, nor the ammunition to cope with an attack on this scale. I *must* have reinforcements, you understand, Colonel, and Marshal Bazaine must supply them. *Allons!* Jump on that famous horse of yours; off with you to General Headquarters at Plappeville and take that urgent message! I'll give it you in writing!"

He stopped to scribble on a page of the notebook held out to him by Delangle. While he was writing, Deodato saw, passing tranquilly down the road that bordered the orchard, an elderly villager in a frock-coat and white trousers, his head protected by a mushroom-shaped straw-hat against the sun. He stood for some minutes in the entry to Saint-Privat, with his hands crossed upon the green umbrella he was carrying, watching the German shells burst all around him; then strolled away along the ridge where the French guns were banging, as coolly as though he were inspecting his bean-rows.

"There you are!" Canrobert tore out the leaf, folded it and handed it to the Colonel. "That into the Marshal's own hands at Plappeville, and ride hard!"

Delangle stretched out his arm to take the note; but at that moment another shell exploded near at hand, flinging a shower of stones from the top of the wall. Delangle's monocle dropped on its string, and with a sort of somnolent look he sagged forward at the knees and fell in a heap against the wall, a shell-splinter in his brain.

"*Fichtre!*" said Canrobert simply, after a professional glance at the body which showed that hope and concern were alike irrelevant. "Who will take my message now?" He picked it from the ground, and looked round for an officer.

"That fellow can ride!" said the Brigadier, pointing to Deodato. "A gentleman-volunteer," he added in a low voice to the Marshal. "Nephew of Count Caprano."

"Old Orlando? *Tiens, c'est drôle!*" murmured Canrobert, giving Deodato a piercing look. "Come here, *mon ami!* Take your Colonel's horse, d'you hear, and ride him like the devil to Plappeville, to the Commander-in-Chief's Headquarters. Give Marshal Bazaine this note . . . into his own hands, no one else's . . . and if he questions you, you are my mouth-piece; use all your force to make him understand the position. I *must* have ammunition . . . guns . . . and men. Tell him what you see and hear now!"

He swung his arm across the horizon—the sky already murked

and dimmed with the stain of war, the pastoral landscape puffing and spitting death from every undulation, the sun-lit plain darkened as if by cloud-shadows with the massing of enemy battalions, whose drums in the fitful lulls of the cannonade could be heard from Saint-Privat. The crash of artillery on either side was so deafening that Deodato had to bend close to the Marshal's ear to hear the last words uttered in his screeching old voice. "*Allez, mon enfant!* It's France we're playing for to-day!"

(2)

Deodato plunged full-tilt on Delangle's powerful bay down through the woods at the back of Saint-Privat towards Saulny. From the trees on either hand the faces of skulkers peeped, some pale and anxious, some cynical and grinning, a few shaking their fists and seizing the chance to retort the cry of "*Fuyard!*" on the galloping cavalryman. A farm-house by the roadside was being pillaged by marauders with unbuttoned tunics, and a shot was even fired at Deodato as he went by. Then he passed a train of loaded ammunition-waggons, rumbling along at an unconcerned walk away from the battlefield.

A fringe of grey houses with the usual spire was Saulny, where he had to turn right from the main road. Red Cross waggons were gathered at the cross-ways, and Gendarmerie lounged in the street. The brave bay raced on tirelessly, and soon, as he plunged through trees and scrub and slopes of bare grass, with Saint-Quentin towering suddenly above, a white, forked sign-post rose into view with "*Lorry*" on one arm, "*Plappeville*" on the other. "*Plappeville*" meant a sharp curve to the left under an overhanging brow, and as Deodato swung into the long lane descending the flank of the hill from which Fort Plappeville, hidden overhead, looked over to Saint-Quentin opposite, a kind of miracle took place.

Deadened by the intervening screen of hills, the artillery-thunder that had followed him thus far snapped off like a broken thread. A stillness succeeded, in which only the hum and buzz and occasional bird-cries of the summer afternoon filled the singing void left in his ears by the cessation of the cannons' voice. Not a soldier or any other token of warfare could be seen; below, the fields dipped away like lengths of shimmering green silk, and in the gap between the two

hills with their hidden fortresses, Metz appeared drowned in rich blue distance, its black cathedral lantern dominating, its arched bridges cutting the streams into silver shields.

The stony, ill-made track grew steeper at the entry to the straggling length of Plappeville village, and Deodato had to slow his horse for fear of injured knees. Near the first houses was a well and public washing-place, and here one of the black-haired Lorraine maidens, with her sleeves rolled to the elbows, was wringing sheets and spreading them to catch the sun on slabs. She gazed at the messenger as he went slithering down the breakneck hill into the village with the unmoved, enigmatic eyes of her race, and bent again, crooning a melancholy song, to her task.

Another sharp corner and Plappeville opened up, a single pleasant street of whitewashed houses and inns with their names painted on their walls. Coquettish little villas with iron gates and stone urns overflowing with flowers peeped here and there upon the highway. The sun beat down, broiling the road with its cobbled patches; shutters were half-closed to keep out the glare; a dog nosing for scraps had the street to himself. The ring of Deodato's horse-hoofs, picking up pace again, seemed an indecent shattering of an æon-long siesta. Never before, it might seem, had Plappeville been disturbed by such a sound at two o'clock of an August afternoon!

A last twist of the descending street, and a more stately villa, almost a miniature château, appeared. It stood back from the road, crowned by a blue mansard roof, guarded by gates of elegant design, embowered in geranium-beds and rose-trees, shaded by well-trimmed shrubberies. From inside the gates came the drowsy whir of a mowing-machine driven over a lawn worthy of some historic cloister by an aged gardener wearing a wide straw-hat.

The tricolour drooping from a staff on the roof, the caparisoned chargers attended by military grooms outside the gates, showed that here was Marshal Bazaine's headquarters. From a window in a house across the road two officers in the braided jackets of the General Staff leaned bare-headed, with cigars between their lips, listening in vain for some sound of the distant conflict. Deodato dismounted and tied his horse to the gate.

"No admission!" growled an orderly, rising yawning from a chair in the hall, as soon as the shadow of the messenger fell across the steps outside.

"Take me to Marshal Bazaine instantly!" retorted Deodato in his officer's voice.

"The Marshal has forbidden his door to everyone," was the answer.

"I must and will see him without delay!" Deodato's voice rang through the shaded gloom of the little hall, with its glimmering, beeswaxed parquet and its feathery grass in pots, as he stepped over the threshold.

"What is the matter now?" demanded a voice overhead, and Deodato looked up, to see dimly a staff-officer leaning over the bannisters.

"An urgent despatch from Marshal Canrobert . . . to be delivered into the Commander-in-Chief's own hands!" he cried.

"Bring it up, then!" answered the officer. "You needn't shout the house down!"

His voice was as hushed as if there were a corpse lying in state above. Deodato's spurs clinked as he ran up the stairs in the stillness punctuated by the throaty ticking of a clock in a corner of the hall.

"In here?" he demanded, laying his hand on a brass door-knob; and before the staff-officer could check him turned the handle and entered the room.

Coming from the glare outside he could at first hardly see in the twilight made by the window-shutters, which had been closed except for a crack, to keep the stabbing sun out of the salon. He could only make out vague figures round a long table.

A sharp voice came from the extreme end of the apartment. "Who is it? What is it? . . . Boyer! *Can't* you forbid my door?"

An officer, sitting alone at a small table in the embrasure of a window, rose and stepped hurriedly towards Deodato, holding out his hand. "A despatch?" he asked curtly. "Hand it to me!"

"It is from Marshal Canrobert for Marshal Bazaine's own hands, *mon Colonel*," answered Deodato, whose eyes were adjusting themselves.

Besides the Colonel's uniform, he now made out the long narrow room with a range of windows on either side and a marble mantelpiece at the far end. Five or six officers were writing busily at the table running down the middle, consulting Army Lists as they

worked. A large map of the district was pinned to the vivid pink wall-paper above a bagatelle-board in a corner.

Without waiting for the Staff-Colonel's answer, Deodato walked straight up to the fire-place, where, almost with his back to him, in a Louis Quinze arm-chair, sat a squat figure which he recognised as the Commander-in-Chief's. His collar, with its stiff embroidery, was unhooked; there was a cup of coffee on a tiny table beside him, a cigar in his mouth, and in his hand a telegram he had just lifted from a tall pile near the coffee-cup.

"Well?" Bazaine, without looking up, extended his ringed hand for the despatch. "Boyer!" he said with knit brows, "this telegram informs me that fifty remounts for the 9th Chasseurs have been sent to Devant-les-Ponts instead of to Montigny. Have a telegram sent from the Fort to the Station Master at Devant-les-Ponts to forward them without delay. Urgent! . . . Now, what's all this?"

He sighed, and put the telegram from Devant-les-Ponts carefully in its place on a file of read ones. Then he glanced over Canrobert's scrawl, stained with dirt and spotted with Delangle's life-blood. It looked a disreputable tatter in this trim and polished salon, but Bazaine seemed insensitive to its suggestion. "Is your Marshal having hallucinations?" he chuckled, still without looking at the messenger. "Anyone would think he had the whole German force on his arm at Saint-Privat! Whereas, according to my view, they have a very different object before them."

"Marshal Canrobert," said Deodato in a respectful tone, "instructed me, *M. le Maréchal*, to impress upon you by word of mouth the urgent character of the situation."

"Oh! every General is in an urgent—not to say desperate—situation as soon as a shot is fired—we know that, don't we, Boyer?" answered Bazaine sardonically. "Every Corps Commander expects the General Reserve of the army to be at his exclusive disposition."

"*M. le Maréchal*," persisted Deodato. "There is no illusion here. The enemy are advancing in immense columns to turn your right flank."

"Marshal Canrobert's right flank," corrected Bazaine, relighting his cigar, which had gone out. "He is a sufficiently experienced commander to be left to his own responsibilities. Boyer, send for another cup of coffee for me! Marshal Canrobert," he continued, blowing out the match, "has an excellent position. He has only to hold it."

"With submission, *M. le Maréchal*, there is a weak spot at Saint-Privat. It lies quite open to the right. And Marshal Canrobert's words are that he *must* have ammunition . . . guns . . . and men . . . and that it is France which is being played for to-day."

"That seems to me very exaggerated language, Captain," said Bazaine, screwing round in his chair, and for the first time seeing the messenger. "Why, who are you?" he asked angrily. "A trooper? How dare they send a trooper to me with a message like this?"

"I ask your pardon, *M. le Maréchal*. I am *estafette* to Staff-Colonel Delangle . . . who was shot as he received the despatch from Marshal Canrobert's hands."

"And in all the Sixth Corps d'Armée there was not, I suppose, a Captain or a Lieutenant left alive . . . but they must send *you*! Well," Bazaine shrugged his shoulders, "they have strange manners in the Army of the Rhine to-day, eh, Boyer?"

The Colonel, who had been Bazaine's jackal and *âme damnée* through the Mexican campaign, sniggered obsequiously.

Deodato, in despair at the way things were going, summoned up all his Italian persuasiveness. "I am very sensible, *M. le Maréchal*, that I am not entitled by rank to appear before you. But there was no time . . . and I am only obeying an order formally given me by a Marshal of France."

"Very well, said Bazaine, his lazy good-humour returning, as he puffed blue coils from his nostrils. "And what then?"

"Then, *M. le Maréchal*, I entreat you to accept my witness. . . . I am an ex-officer, a volunteer . . . one who in other days has met you in the Tuileries, *M. le Maréchal* . . . and I know what I am saying . . . The German artillery is crushing Marshal Canrobert's batteries . . . a tremendous assault by the Prussian Guard is preparing . . . is perhaps at this moment while I am speaking to you being delivered. I come, Monsieur, from where my comrades are fighting and dying . . . for France! I know you will not leave them without succour. Your whole line depends on what you do at this hour . . . and, *M. le Maréchal*, there are not many hours to spare!"

Bazaine stood up with a grunt, and remained staring down at the maidenhair ferns filling the summer fire-place. He seemed disturbed.

"A nice little lesson in strategy from the troop!" said Colonel Boyer caustically in the silence.

Bazaine made a gesture with his hand to still him. Then he

threw his cigar-end into the grate, and slowly turned about as if he found even that movement difficult. Deodato could not understand the comatose condition into which the commander whom he had seen two days ago rallying troops on the field by sheer personality, engaging in joyous cut-and-thrust with Prussian cavalrymen, had fallen to-day. Bazaine rocked forward on his toes, as if balancing dreadful alternatives, and a sword of sunshine, piercing a cleft in the shutters, fell full on his impassive Oriental face with the high cheek-bones. He passed a nervous hand over his beard, and as he did so, Deodato, with his intuitive quickness, discerned at the back of the sharp, little black eyes an acute anguish, the agony of a man conscious of his total inadequacy. With an almost desperate gesture, the Marshal walked over to the map on the wall, and snatched up the white billiard-cue from the bagatelle-board underneath.

"Look!" he exclaimed, "look here, my friend, and try to make it plain, if you can, to Marshal Canrobert! It is not at Saint-Privat that the danger lies at all. It is here," he rapped the plan with the cue, "here on my left, at General Frossard's position and Marshal Lebœuf's. The enemy is massing immense reinforcements there . . . what do I know? . . . it may be another Army, the Prussian Crown Prince's, is threatening us from Gorze and Novéant. Does your Marshal expect me to strip my left . . . where the real danger is . . . the danger that I may be cut off from Metz and the Forts? If the enemy shows himself in too great strength at Saint-Privat, all Marshal Canrobert has to do is to fall back upon strong positions, p-positions," he stammered a little awkwardly, "already prepared . . . under the shelter of the Forts."

"*M. le Maréchal*," pleaded Deodato, "if Saint-Privat is enveloped, how many will escape to the shelter of the Forts?"

Bazaine once more passed his hand over his chin, with the same worried, irresolute air. Then he swung round to the bagatelle-board, and with a mechanical gesture struck the balls with the cue, making them cannon and click in the quiet of the salon with its scratching quills. Then he let the cue fall, and faced the unwelcome messenger, leaning on his short, thick legs against the board. "I will do what I can," he said. "I cannot make infantry out of air. But ammunition I will send. Wait below, wait a few minutes! I will come myself and see what the situation is. If my old comrade Canrobert is so hard pressed——"

"What would this trooper know about that?" Boyer dared to interject. "He comes racing off the field in a panic. . . . I can see his horse through the window, knocked up and sweating. He brings his own terrors to you——"

"*Assez, Boyer, assez!*" drawled Bazaine. "Didn't I say I was going myself to see? Perhaps I can spare a Brigade of the Guard. . . . I will let you know, *M. le Volontaire*. . . . You others go on with the lists of promotions."

(3)

Deodato went downstairs to the hall with a load off his mind. He had convinced the Commander-in-Chief, he believed. If only Bazaine did not delay too long!

From the porch he looked out on the peaceful garden with its flamboyant colours. The lawn-mower still hummed its lullaby; a charger tied up by the coach-house stamped a bored hoof; a fat white cat on the stones below the steps stretched itself, basked in the warmth, and fell to sleep again. The minutes lounged past.

Uneasiness began presently to take hold once more on Deodato. Was the Marshal never coming? He glanced up the staircase; silence had settled once more on the villa, as if all the world had gone to sleep. The clock ticked throatily; its hands said a quarter past three. How the time had gone! How perilous these delays!

To cheat his impatience he strolled over and studied the clock. It was an old-fashioned piece of furniture that seemed to have strayed into this spick-and-span modern villa from some curiosity-shop in the Jewish lanes of Metz. It stood, with gilt garlands and cherubs wreathing its face, in a violoncello-shaped walnut case, down which stretched the lank effigy of Father Time with his scythe upraised. Suddenly this figure took on a terrifying significance. The gilt hands crawled forward, the guttural voice sounded inside the walnut panel, and here was the scythe relentlessly mowing down the precious moments as they ticked past. *Tick-tack!* while the fate of France was being diced for up on the hills out of sight and sound. *Tick-tack!* while they played with bomb and bullet for virgin, never-captured Metz and ancient Lorraine; *tick-tack!* while the stake was great white Paris with its arches and avenues; *tick-tack!* while the wager was the fields and harvests, the lives

of the young peasants and townsmen of France, her prosperity, honour and freedom; *tick-tack!* for mothers and children, wives and lovers; *tick-tack . . . tick-tack!* under the Scythe—and the white cat still basked on the hot stone, blinking its satisfaction with one yellow-rimmed eye . . . and not a sound came from the Marshal's room upstairs . . . and the hands of the clock now stood at a quarter to four and over. Deodato in torment swung away from it, and stood staring into the garden again.

He was roused by its gay tinkle chiming four, and at the same moment spurred feet sounded on the stairs, and he saluted as Bazaine jerked heavily downwards followed by Colonel Boyer and a couple of other officers. They were all laughing together as they descended, and Deodato heard Boyer declare, "*Le beau malheur alors, M. le Maréchal!*" "A lucky mischance!" What on earth could the man mean by that? A lucky mischance if they were defeated? No, it was incredible! He must have heard wrongly!

He had expected to be spoken to at the door, but Bazaine passed out without looking at him. He hurried after the Marshal to the gates, where he was preparing to mount his horse. "No galloping for me to-day!" Deodato heard him say, fingering his epaulette tenderly before taking the reins. "The contusion I got from that splinter at Borny is very painful."

He hoisted himself into the saddle, and then saw Deodato looking up at him. "You here still, *M. le Volontaire?*" he laughed. "*Ma foi*, I had forgotten you! Well, there is no more to be said. Marshal Canrobert has a strong position, and it is for him to hold it."

"But *M. le Maréchal!*" cried Deodato, "your promise . . . the ammunition . . . the reinforcements. . . I cannot take 'no' back for only answer to Marshal Canrobert!"

"Well," again Bazaine seemed to veer, "I will see what can be done. I am going to examine the field of battle for myself . . . from Saint-Quentin."

From Saint-Quentin, not Saint-Privat? . . . He was going away from the scene of conflict, not towards it? . . . Deodato, unwilling to believe his ears, ran after the Marshal's cortège into the street. He saw him joined by four or five members of the General Staff from the house opposite; then all together they passed through a gate into a field, and leisurely pursued a track leading towards the acclivity of the great Fort. The sun shone on gilt képis and sparkled from scabbards; then they passed into the shadow of the

woods clothing the lower slopes . . . And with the clarity of second sight as they receded Deodato beheld the unrolling of a dreadful scroll—the shattered Army of the Rhine driven in behind the forts of Metz, the enemy masses closing round and establishing the siege, the famine, the capitulation, the vast host with its Marshals and Generals, its eagles and guns, the whole Imperial Guard with the flower of France's cavalry and infantry, marching out into the night of captivity in Germany . . . and at the end of the record a shabby little figure limping away through history with the stamp of "traitor" on its forehead!

The tiny cortège had emerged from the woods now, and, reduced to dwarf-size, wound glittering upwards. Below on the plain Metz lifted its inviolate towers in the tranquil afternoon.

(4)

Left alone in the torrid village street, Deodato was overcome by an immense desolation. Fatigued by his galloping, extenuated with hunger (for he had tasted nothing but a drop of black camp coffee since taking the saddle at daybreak), and now overwhelmed to realise that his mission had ended in failure, he felt for a few minutes as if he could not take up the burden of the coming hours. then, pricked by duty, he walked wearily back to the villa and untied his horse.

It, too, seemed tired and dispirited by the heat as he climbed into the saddle, and he had not the heart to urge it up the steep ascent out of the village. At the top of the climb it occurred to him that he might avoid the bend by Saulny and make a quicker journey back by cutting straight through the woods to the north-east. He followed the impulse, and soon found himself lost in a maze of rides and glades. He could hardly guide himself by the now declining sun seen through the trees overhead, and was reproaching himself severely when the sound of music came to his ears.

He reined in the bay and listened. Yes! it was a military band, coming to meet him along some track of which he had not known the presence to his left. It was a magnificent band, playing "*Partant pour la Syrie*"—such brass, he felt with a sudden leap of his heart, could only belong to the Guard! As he craned forward in the saddle

to listen his doubts were set at rest, for the band sopped playing and the unseen soldiers began to sing as they drew near :

That *chic* you see
In the infantry,
Who does it ? HE !
Yes, BOURBAKI !

It *was* the Guard, reviving in honour of their Commander, General Bourbaki, the song his Turcos used to sing years ago in Africa ! What had happened ? Had Bazaine, viewing the angry battle-horizon from the crest of Saint-Quentin, relented after all and sent an order to the Guard to advance ? Or had the dashing Bourbaki taken it on himself to bring forward the Reserve into the battle-line ? That would be like him ! But what did it matter ? The Guard was coming, as they had done in the crucial hour at Rezonville, and in a moment the stone rolled off Deodato's heart. His fatigue seemed to drop off him as he urged the bay forward through the brakes towards the sound of the singing, and in a few minutes emerged upon a road that ran up through the woods towards Amanvilliers. As he leapt out upon it across the ditch, the noise of the cannonade came sweeping down the defile to his ears with a volume that showed how much the battle had gained in intensity since he had been sent to Plappeville.

But for the moment he did not regard it. He was gazing joyously at the long column of Grenadiers that stood halted under their eagles upon the road, with the crimson trousers and white-bound turbans of the Zouaves continuing the line against the sombre green velvet to which the evening light was turning the wood, and the black-and-flame artillery drivers just showing behind round a curve. He had found the Guard ! Now he must triumph with his eloquence, to bring them back to the aid of Marshal Canrobert !

Before he could look round for the Commanding Officers he was hailed imperiously from behind his back, and turned his horse to behold, quite close to him, General Bourbaki himself, surrounded by his Staff. He sat gallant-looking as a paladin of legend on his satin-coated black horse, his snowy gauntlets and patent-leather riding-boots agleam like fairy trappings in the westering sun, which beat through the glade, intensifying the scented heat of the forest.

"Come here, Chasseur !" he called. "Are you from the front ?

Deodato saluted. "No, *mon Général*, from Plappeville! I am the bearer of a message from Marshal Canrobert—praying for immediate help from the Guard," he added daringly.

Bourbaki struck his fist on his pommel. "*But tonnerre de Dieu!* I cannot aid everyone! Here is an aide-de-camp from General Ladmirault, begging me to support the Fourth Corps at Amanvilliers!" His voice had risen shrilly, and from its tone and a rolling look in his eyes, Deodato realised that his dignified bearing concealed an inner agitation.

The aide from the Fourth Corps, Captain La Tour du Pin, respectfully intervened. "*Mon Général*, if the Guard attacks between Amanvilliers and Saint-Privat you will be relieving both General Ladmirault and Marshal Canrobert at a stroke . . . but time is everything!"

"You talk at your ease, Captain! It is not so simple!" Bourbaki's handsome Greek face was pale, his teeth kept appearing and disappearing on the fringe of his curled moustache. "I have reason to believe from very good information that at any moment we may be attacked from the region of Thionville," he turned supplely in his saddle and pointed backwards to the north-east, "by a fresh German Army, General von Falkenstein's, that is crossing the Moselle there. We shall be in a pretty mess if they take us in the rear!"

La Tour du Pin gazed at him in amazement. "But, *mon Général*, it is impossible . . . no one has heard of any such thing . . ."

"I have heard, I tell you, and that is enough for me! I will not move until my scouts return!" He struck spurs to his horse and cantered along the grass edge of the road, stopping at every clearing to peer through his glasses, in hope of getting a distant view through the trees. Deodato and the Captain stared at each other, forgetting difference of rank in a community of consternation. What malign spell, Deodato thought, had fallen this August upon the Generals of France, men one and all of approved valour, causing them to tremble at the shadow of their own thoughts, to quake at the approach of phantom armies?

"Well, did you see anything?" Bourbaki returned full gallop to question an officer who had emerged from the wood. He had been sent into it to spy from an eminence whence the Moselle valley was visible.

"Not a sign of any enemy," answered the scout.

"You see, General!" insisted La Tour. "It is not there; it is in front of you at Amanvilliers, at Saint-Privat that the enemy lies . . . and victory is waiting on you! But the moment presses; only look yonder!"

Over the tree-tops ahead smoke was shooting in fresh, immense clouds, and the bellowing of the cannonade was increasing to frenzy. "Provided it is not too late already!" murmured the anxious aide.

For a second Bourbaki still hesitated, then, "I believe you are right, La Tour," he said decisively. "Let us march to the fire!"

He spurred his charger forward; the Grenadiers came to the slope, and the magnificent Division stepped out upon the road, leaving the bands by the side of the wood; the bugles of the Zouaves blaring the "Sambre et Meuse" March, the artillery rumbling hearteningly in the rear.

But as they swung up towards Amanvilliers through the close sunset blaze a disagreeable impression awaited them. Along the road coming to meet them a stream of fugitives appeared, not only wounded men making their way from the field, officiously assisted by comrades even when they needed no support, but groups and large parties of unhurt men, who strolled along with their rifles over their shoulders, smoking and chatting as if they had been dismissed from a parade, and had no more interest in the battle they had left. In answer to the objurgations of Bourbaki's Staff and the taunts hurled from the files of the Grenadiers, most replied that they had no cartridges and were not going to stand up to be massacred without means of resistance; while others declared that the Prussian artillery had silenced all their guns and smashed the whole line to pieces. A few answered reproaches with insults. "What's the good of the Guard arriving *now*? . . . You wait till it's well over, don't you? . . . Flunkys! . . . *Salauds de Prétoriens!*"

Deodato, who was riding close by the Staff, observed that the spectacle of these runagates and their insubordination was painfully affecting General Bourbaki. "*C'est affreux . . . Mais, c'est affreux!*" he kept repeating. "What can you do with such soldiers? . . . *Nous sommes f . . . !*"

His eyes fell on a genuine stretcher-case that was being carried past, a Captain with both legs broken. Bourbaki paused a moment to condole with him. The wounded man raised himself on his elbow and cried hoarsely, "But never mind me, General! Advance,

advance! You can still save Marshal Canrobert. He has repulsed the Prussian Guard . . . they are lying in thousands on the slopes before Saint-Privat! You never saw such a massacre . . . But their artillery is terrible . . . terrible!"

"*En avant!*" said Bourbaki resolutely, and impeded though it was by the rout of fugitives swarming denser and denser across the road, the Guard forced its way on towards the widening gap of grey light that showed where the forest ended on the open ridge. Arrived at that point, while his battalions deployed in fine order to right and left along the fringe of the wood, Bourbaki surveyed the scene. The flat hill-top stretched away on either hand to where the roofs and spires of Amanvilliers and Saint-Privat could be dimly seen in the failing light of the day, appearing and disappearing through wreaths of smoke, and shaken by thunderous detonations.

All the horizon fumed and roared in the shroud of the gathering twilight; the shells could be seen exploding along the edge of the ridge like fountain-jets; while in the foreground the hill-top, broken by shallow depressions and risings, marked by a few white walls and some blazing huts and cottages, showed the usual hateful debris of battle—dead men, wounded men crawling and dragging themselves along, skulkers bent double as they pretended to search for cartridges in the pouches of the fallen or to be aiding the wounded or carrying messages—any excuse to slink into the shelter of the woods—wrecked caissons, prone horses with red entrails gaping. "*Fichtre!*" muttered Bourbaki between his teeth. "*Ah! Sacré nom d'un nom!*"

And at that moment unluckily there flooded into view over a slight eminence a panic-stricken wave of what looked like at least two regiments. Mounted officers were struggling to rally them, and a certain number faced about and began to kneel and fire at their imaginary pursuers. The rest rushed on towards the wall of white facings presented by the Grenadiers on the verge of the trees. . . . Then, over the same slope dashed, helter-skelter, two or three fugitive gun-teams, their drivers lashing them madly . . .

It was too much for Bourbaki. He turned, almost snarling, upon Captain La Tour du Pin. "What do you mean by this, Captain?" he shouted. "You promised me a victory, and you take me into the midst of a defeat! . . . It is a defeat such as France has never known! . . . Where are my guns? . . . You have endangered

the Guard, Monsieur ! It was a disgraceful act—to tempt me from my magnificent positions ! ”

La Tour flushed with uncontrollable indignation. “ Very well, then, General,” he snapped. “ You can go back to your magnificent positions ! ”

“ I shall . . . and without your leave, Captain ! ” Standing up in his stirrups Bourbaki waved his arm and shouted at the top of his voice, “ *Demi-tour !* Right about face ! . . . Do you hear, Battalion Commanders ? *Demi-tour, la Garde !* ”

For a second there was an incredulous silence ; then from the ranks welled up a protesting growl. Fists and rifles were raised in the air ; men sprang from the line as if to form a circle round their General ; the colour-bearers, on a common impulse, lifted the eagles and presented them, on fire in the smoky crimson of the sunset, as if to shame him. “ *Non ! non !* ” mounted the menacing roar. “ *En avant ! A la baïonnette ! La Garde ne recule pas !* We never go back ! ”

But Bourbaki seemed not to hear them. He rode feverishly along the line, repeating his command, “ Right about face ! Right about face, the Guard ! ” From the ranks of the Zouaves men rushed forward, clustering with angry, bearded faces round his horse, snatching at his bridle to make him turn and face the battlefield. . . . It was all in vain. The Grenadier officers, who had now got their men in hand again, had no choice but to obey orders. Deodato, sitting his horse with death in his heart, saw the battalions wheeling, disappearing into the gloom of the forest, where night already reigned ; the splendid, white-braided tunics effaced as if by a black stain, the eagles turning on their outstretched wings to flit through the shades like furtive vultures fleeing from the hunter . . . the eagles of the Guard that had never yet shown their golden backs to an enemy ! And as the whole mass dissolved and vanished into darkness, there sighed in his ears the voice of the cantinière of Rezonville, “ *Finie la Garde . . . Finie ! Finie !* ”

(5)

Deodato came back with a start from a sort of trance, in which he had been conscious of nothing but the faces of the little French *Lignards* around him in the cemetery of Saint-Privat—heroic faces,

with their peasant bluntness carved away by the simplicity of their resolve. From a group of marble warriors on an antique temple they became again live boys and men, grime-streaked, blood-bespattered, handling their burning-hot chassepots among the graves in the last desperate defence of the village against the encroaching troops of the Crown-Prince of Saxony. Back came the cataract of noise, the agony in Deodato's shoulder, the feel of the pistol he was pointing with his left hand across a tomb-stone at the Saxon soldiers in the flame-lit dusk.

And yet not the whole of him had come back from the strange country of vision into which he had been abruptly plunged. He felt aloof yet acquiescent, illuminated by the necessity and the grandeur of the offering that was being made around him. And as shred by shred the mystical understanding of these throes of the World-Spirit faded from him, he was still left with the contented realisation that here was France, the essential France, in the persons of this little band of devoted conscripts.

Strange tranquillity, huddled behind a flat grave in an inferno of racket, conflagration, pain and death! It was the sequel to a series of nightmare experiences which had been shot at him, as if from a gun, since the despairing moment when he had seen the Imperial Guard turn back from the battle at the edge of the woods. There had been the face of old Canrobert, bristling like a fierce white cat at bay by the porch of the church, when he had reported the failure of his mission to Bazaine; he doubted if the veteran had even heard his shouting amid the explosions, the clattering tiles, the shrieks of the last, concentrated German bombardment of the village. . . . There had been the ground rushing up to meet him as Colonel Delangle's bay charger had plunged forward, shot, and had flung him over its head while he sought to recross the open ground behind Saint-Privat and join his regiment of Chasseurs in the rear. . . . There had been the red-hot pain which had told him that this time his arm had certainly gone again in the old place by the shoulder-socket . . . the dulling of the pain by rage and the urgent instinct of self-preservation, as he plucked Delangle's loaded revolver from the holster on the dead horse with his uninjured hand . . . his escape, bent double, under the hail of bullets from the advancing enemy skirmishers, towards the nearest houses of the village.

Voices had called to him from behind a wall, and he had joined

himself to this squad of infantrymen, led by a Corporal. Cut off from its regiment, it was still resisting with a kind of cold gaiety—" *V'lan dans l'œil!* " . . . " One for the officer! "—the outflanking movement of the Saxon Corps, which had made a long march in a half-circle through the afternoon to turn Saint-Privat from the north-east as the evening fell.

After a short while, "*Faut filer! Faut filer!*" the Corporal had roared. " It's getting too hot here! Follow me, children! Come along, Chasseur! " On his heels, with Deodato painfully holding his limp arm, they had dashed through a farmyard and out into the northern street of the village, in which flames now belched from every window against a black sky. There, however, they were met with a withering fire from the enemy, whose helmets gleamed in a ruddy bank across the causeway; and, diminished by half, they had flung themselves into the cemetery close at hand, where from the cover of the low wall and the tombstones they had unconquerably maintained their fire. . . . Surely it must have been a delusion, Deodato thought, as he propped himself up seeking a good mark for the last of Colonel Delangle's cartridges, that he had seen from the road the man with the green umbrella, standing in an alley between houses and watching the fray with the same detached curiosity as in the morning?

Here came the Saxons again, pouring over the wall, bursting through the gateway under its stone cross! Now for the last cartridge! . . . But suddenly a shell flew whistling and screaming overhead, and exploded in the very middle of the cemetery, raising the peaceful forefathers of the hamlet from their resting-places and hurling friend and foe alike into the air.

Deodato, who had fallen flat behind the mound of a grave, was untouched. Through the suffocating smoke there rained all round him torn limbs in red French trousers and blue Saxon tunics, mingled with skulls and bones and fragments of carved stone, as the ancient inhabitants of the village field of peace were tumbled together with new French blood and the bodies of German strangers from far-away homes in one ghastly rubbish-heap of Mars; then all was still but the faint moaning of dying men.

For a few seconds Deodato lay, half-stunned and hallucinated. He distinctly saw moving among the shattered monuments the figure of Marsh, exclaiming, " Here's a werry sad waste of material! " Then, coming to his wits, he staggered to his feet and reeled out of

the place of horror into the street again. . . . Through flames that seemed to scorch his face and the restless *ping! ping!* of bullets on the walls on either side of him, he reached, he knew not how, the church-door and pushed it open.

A hideous stench greeted him, and he saw the whole floor of the nave and the chapels by the apse loaded with wounded on blankets or on straw, with surgeons in blood-splashed aprons tending them. The groans and cries were terrible, mounting to the crystal chandeliers, whose light had been augmented by that of all the altar-candles, giving the place the look of some heathen temple dedicated to human sacrifices.

Deodato tottered up the nave, with a vague hope of getting his arm strapped; then a shell struck the steeple overhead. There was a stupefying crash, and masonry and tiles poured in a cascade through the roof, shivering the chandeliers, overturning the candles, whose yellow flames ran licking up the altar draperies amid the shrieks of the wounded, and plunging the whole place into lurid half-darkness. Dominating the uproar, the church-bells rolled with a metallic clang upon the pavement of the nave. . . .

Deodato offered his sound shoulder to a wounded man, whom he helped out of a side-door, followed by the Red Cross workers supporting and carrying other victims. But outside the church all stopped in confusion; the street was packed from edge to edge with German infantry, the Prussian Guard, who had reformed after their bloody repulse and arrived to complete the victory of the Saxons. Their silver buttons and helmet-spikes scintillated in the flames of the burning houses; their mounted commanders towered from a hedge of bayonets.

As Deodato stood wondering how to escape, for, with a revolver still holding a cartridge stuck in his belt, he could hardly hope to share the privileges of the wounded, something plucked at his sound arm. He turned, to find it was the crook of an umbrella! Behind him stood the elderly villager who had been the strange spectator of the whole day's conflict, jerking his thumb over his shoulder as if inviting Deodato to follow him.

He obeyed, having no better plan, and the umbrella man swiftly led the way round the corner of the church and plunged into a black alley along which Deodato would have found it hard to follow him but for the twinkle of his white trousers going on ahead. The alley seemed to wind and twist endlessly; but Deodato did his best to

come up with his guide, and when he succeeded heard him trying the door-handles of the houses on one side of the alley. Several were locked, but at last one turned, and he beckoned Deodato after him. Bewildered, the fugitive followed him through a stone-floored kitchen, where, by the glow of a dying fire, a family of children could be seen crouching with terrified faces in a corner, out into a passage, and then into a backyard whence distant volleys could be heard, and the sky was tremulous overhead with the reflection of fires. Deodato's mysterious protector crossed this yard, scrambled by way of a dung-hill in the corner on to the wall, and extended his hand to the injured Chasseur to help him across. In spite of the agony of the process, Deodato was impressed by the muscular strength with which the man helped him over and set him on his feet.

They were now in a much smaller yard, opening from a small, whitewashed cottage, apparently on the edge of the village, the back door of which the man stooped to unlock, with his umbrella still under his arm. He dragged Deodato into a dark passage, while he locked the door again; and then drawled in the harsh accent of Lorraine, "*Chez-moi!*" He pushed his guest into a room, and Deodato heard him closing the shutters carefully. Then a match scraped, a candle glimmered, and as its flame darted up revealed a bare room with an oleograph of the Imperial Family over the fireplace, some rush-bottomed chairs and a substantial kitchen-table. The place was chilling and stuffy, but extraordinarily peaceful; it might have been a hundred miles from the scene of battle.

"*Eh b'en!*" Deodato's deliverer grinned at him. "You're all right now! I must find a morsel to eat, while you take off those clothes." He had a lean, sardonic face, that might have been hewn from dark wood, and seemed hugely amused by the situation. "*Eh b'en!*" he repeated with a humorously exaggerated gesture. "Take off your uniform, I say!"

"Why must I?" Deodato laid his hand on his Chasseur tunic.

"Be your death if you don't, *mon gars!* . . . Or do you want to be their prisoner? They won't be good to you!"

"Can I escape?" Deodato sank upon a chair, nursing the racking agony of his arm and shoulder.

"*Ah! oué!*" replied the Lorrainer. "Of course, not in those feathers!" He jerked his thumb towards the ceiling. "Blouse and sabots: labourer's clothes! I have some up there."

Deodato reflected. "I should have to pass through the Prussian lines. Who would guide me?"

The Lorrainer slapped his chest mock-heroically. "That's my affair! I'll get you out, '*au clair de la lune, mon ami Pierrot*'!" He grinned again. "But first I must bury those things of yours in the midden! . . . Ah! listen well!"

He held up a finger. From across the houses whose back-yards they had traversed came the reverberation of rifle-butts on a door' and shouts of "Open! Open!" in German. Then there was a shot and the tinkle of breaking window-glass. "*Tas de salauds*!" growled the Lorrainer, listening with his hands in his pockets. Female screams went up. "And that," he added, "is what the women have to expect. . . . I know them, I have a cousin living over there on the Rhine . . . *salaud lui aussi*!" His mocking black eyes came back to his guest. "Lucky for you, my lad, I found you in the churchyard! I am the only man in Saint-Privat who could get you through the Prussian lines to-night. I alone know all the lanes and tracks and ditches . . . I ought to. I have farmed here, man and boy, forty-five years, yes, I who speak to you! I'll see you through. . . . But first we must eat a morsel . . . and find something to tie up that arm of yours . . . that's a dirty arm you've got there, you know."

He went to a cupboard and fetched out a leg of fowl on a plate, half of a long French loaf, a piece of cheese and a bottle of beer. "Eat!" he said, "make yourself at home! . . . Why the devil must the French and Germans always come *here* for their quarrels? Seems they can never leave Lorraine alone! Still," he cut himself a chunk of cheese, "I prefer the French. The French let you call your soul your own. The Germans, they won't let you live . . . you should meet my cousin. . . . Ah! *pouah! Sale gredin*!" he wrinkled his nose. "Why don't you eat? No appetite? *Rapport à ton bras*! It's that filthy arm of yours! Never mind! I'll see you through!"

Deodato drank some of the beer, but felt too sick with pain and exhaustion to eat. The room with its few, bare ornaments sometimes swelled round him like a dream. Once he heard a tramp of marching feet go by the end of the lane in which the cottage stood, and rose unsteadily from his chair, feeling for his pistol.

"*Eh! je m'en f . . . !*" growled the Lorrainer over the edge of his mug. "Sit down! There are no lights showing here!"

About a quarter of an hour later there resounded all over Saint-Privat a deep-throated chant, the young Prussian Guardsmen raising their hymn of victory. "*Heil dir im Sieger Kranz.*" There was something grand and yet terrible in the fanatical roar of it, as of a race dedicating themselves to the idea of conquest; heard thus among the smouldering ruins of what had in the dawn been a contented French village, it was the most unnerving thing to the crippled soldier that could have been devised. At the finish of it came a series of rhythmical cheers, not spontaneous like English or French enthusiasm, but rigidly drilled and snapping off like the voice of a single giant. A tremendous fanfare of bugles and kettle-drums concluded the demonstration.

"*Eh! m . . . alors!*" said the Lorrainer by way of "Amen!"

QUATRE-SEPTEMBRE

(I)

IT was about six in the morning when Ludovica woke upon the couch where she had been uneasily sleeping in the Green Salon of the Empress's private suite in the Tuileries.

For a moment she lay staring up at the flower-wreathed ceiling, confusedly wondering where she was; then started to her feet, throwing off the rug that had covered her, and ran to the window overlooking the Gardens. The morning of Sunday, September 4th, was dawning over Paris in a quiet that contrasted with the noise of tramping and singing crowds that had filled the hours of the night. All that agitation seemed now to have passed away; birds were singing in the Gardens, and church-bells clanging for Mass came to the ear from every quarter of the city as Ludovica opened the window to listen. The sky was bright, the air cool and sparkling; the bluish September mists were dissolving into a brilliant late summer day.

It seemed impossible that this calm should hide the threat of immediate Revolution. Yet Ludovica would not have passed the night half-dressed on a sofa in the Palace if the danger had not been real and pressing. As soon as she had seen to the burial of her husband in his family mausoleum at Père-Lachaise she had hastened to offer her services to the Empress in her distress. She had experienced little difficulty in bringing the Duke's body to Paris by train from Verdun; when she left Rezonville with the coffin in a country cart the Prussians had even provided a guard of honour. It was at Paris that she had met with unexpected rebuffs. The new Military Governor of the capital, General Trochu, had made excuses for refusing Smolensk a full General's funeral. She knew that this Breton, with his bald dome of head and pinched, sacerdotal features, had been one of the Opposition Generals, only appointed to his present post as a sop to the enemies of the tottering Empire;

but she had not supposed his virtuous spite would have extended so far against a notorious supporter of the hated régime. It was one more proof of the general abandonment of the Napoleonic dynasty. . . . Not that any dynasty, in France, could have had real hope of surviving the stroke of last night's news—the surrender of the Emperor with all Mac-Mahon's Army at the close of the bloody day of encirclement at Sedan.

Yes, the end was certainly at hand. The Republican party had been organising all night ; the storm must break ; the only question really was how the Empress, still bravely playing her rôle of Regent in the Tuileries, could be delivered from the hands of the insurrectionaries. Ludovica had admired the grandeur of soul with which Eugénie had responded to her gesture of devotion, forgetting old rancours as she welcomed back to the post of peril her former lady-in-waiting. Ludovica had admired still more her stoic courage in adversity ; her bearing up against the double blow of learning that her husband was a prisoner in the hands of the Germans, her son a fugitive in Belgium ; the self-abnegation with which she had proclaimed that in this hour she would act only in the interests of France and strike no blow for the dynasty.

Ludovica hastened to finish her dressing, and then wandered out into the great, empty salon of the First Consul, and thence along the suite of state-rooms facing the Court of the Carrousel on the first storey. Their echoing desolation struck on her heart. The furniture was swathed in brown holland, which had not been removed on the precipitate return of the Empress and her household from Saint-Cloud when the first French disasters were announced ; and the rising sun now streamed through the long windows on to bare floor-boards where throngs of courtiers had been used to step delicately on glowing carpets.

She looked out into the square of the Carrousel. All seemed peaceful there, the decorated railings stretching like a gold pencil-line across the deserted expanse, over which a squadron of Cuirassiers mounted guard with the marble Arch shining above their helmets. Ludovica returned to the salon of the Marshals, and looked out from here once more on the garden front. This view was not quite so reassuring. In the wide central alley that ran down to the grille separating the private gardens from the public walks a company of Voltigeurs was drawn up, their sumptuous shakoes afire in the strengthening sunrays. Entry to the public gardens had been

closed, but from the balcony of the Marshals' salon it was possible for Ludovica, by the aid of the tortoise-shell lorgnette she sometimes used now to correct her short sight, to discern a dark mass pressed against the farther railings, with the specks of képis and the tiny streaks of rifle-barrels waving in the air. Evidently the mob was assembling, and the civic militia of the National Guard was fraternising with them.

A footstep came over the floor towards her. She turned, and saw the Empress's faithful usher, M. Bignet, at her side.

"There is a gentleman below who demands to see you, *Mme. la Duchesse*," he said.

She looked at him in astonishment. "Pray show him up, then, Monsieur."

Bignet shook his head. "That I cannot do, Madame," he murmured. . . . "Think! An unknown at a time like this! . . . Though it seemed to me that the gentleman's face was familiar. . . . But if *Mme. la Duchesse* will be good enough to go down to see him . . . and vouch for him. . . . If it is a friend . . . !"

Ludovica hurried through the ushers' anteroom and down the grand staircase into the vestibule. A man was waiting there in the shadow of the arch; he took a step forward, and she uttered a cry of joy. It was Deodato—Deodato in civil dress, his arm strapped in a sling, his face haggard despite its welcoming smile, some grey hairs streaking the black tufts over his temples.

"It is you!" She could hardly restrain herself from rushing into his arms.

"It is I!" He took her two hands into his single one. "You see, I can't go back to the ranks as I am. But I have come to offer my body to protect the Empress. Will she accept me?"

"I will take you to her. She is in council at the moment. Come upstairs with me and wait. . . . Deodato, how did you get here? Is not Bazaine's army shut up in Metz?"

With M. Bignet's permission, Ludovica took Deodato into the Green Salon where she had passed the night, and there, sitting beside her, he told her briefly the details of his escape from Saint-Privat. How the dour Lorrainer, with his perpetual mocking grin, had contrived by stealth to bring the village apothecary to him, who had strapped his arm and padded his shoulder to the best of his knowledge. How the two of them had then set out at midnight, and

crept, by alleys and sunken paths and ditches known to his guide, out of the edge of the village and down the slope to a barn on the way to Roncourt. They had burrowed under a refuse-heap to elude a Prussian patrol passing the end of Saint-Privat, and wriggled, with agony to Deodato, along a wet drain to circumvent a sentinel whose spiked helmet they had seen in silhouette against the stars at the foot of the hill. In the morning Deodato was so exhausted and feverish that the Lorrainer had had to use his local influence at Roncourt to get a little cart and drive his "man" on a pile of straw northwards in the direction of Thionville, to get out of the radius of the German occupation. On that drive they had met a patrol of Uhlans and been interrogated; but the bluff, white-whiskered Major commanding the detachment had been easy-going—the fellow in sabots who said he had broken his arm falling from a hay-cart was obviously not an able-bodied enemy, neither had he the look of a Frenchman; and they were allowed to pass. At a farm near Thionville the Lorrainer had left Deodato, acknowledging his gratitude with a grimace; and in that place Deodato had lain ill for eight days, and a doctor from the town had set his broken bone with reasonable skill. Thence he had travelled circuitously by way of Montmedy and Rheims to Paris, just in time to escape the great northerly wheel of the German armies upon Sedan. He had been compelled to rest a day or two in the quiet of Cythère, but had risen from his bed as quickly as he could, to come and offer his services to the Empress.

"Your head is bad, dear?" asked Ludovica, noting that he passed his hand over his forehead as he finished his narrative.

"A little! The doctor told me I had had a blow there, though I had not noticed it in the fighting. I think it may have been a flying piece of a tombstone when the shell dropped in the cemetery at Saint-Privat." He shivered at the memory. "I had a kind of hallucination there . . . I fancied I saw *le vieux Marsh*. . . I certainly get headaches, and my eyes are sometimes queer. I see things double, and sometimes tread on steps that are not there. A broken arm and spoilt eyes! Good for a sculptor!" he added, with a touch of bitterness.

Ludovica pressed his hand, and at that moment Bignet entered and invited them to lunch. "They have prepared something in the Pavillon de Marsan," he said. "Some eggs . . . cold meat . . . poor fare for the Tuileries . . . but better than an empty stomach.

... Pray, eat something, M. Caprano—I recognise you now. You will need what strength you can gain if you are to aid her Majesty this afternoon."

"What has the Empress decided to do, M. Bignet?" demanded Deodato.

"What do I know?" replied the usher. "She has been seeing a deputation from the loyal deputies in the Parliament. I believe they have advised her to abdicate her functions as Regent. They fear from hour to hour the Corps Législatif will be invaded by the mob and the Republic proclaimed. . . . I fear an attack on the Tuileries at any moment."

"Why does not the Governor of Paris march with a sufficient force to the Tuileries to protect the Empress? He can . . . and it is his duty!"

"Oh! Trochu!" Bignet shrugged his shoulders. "We've taken his measure. *Tiens!* Do you know the reply he sent to the Empress an hour ago when she appealed for military protection. 'I can let your majesty have an Officer of Mobiles—in uniform.' *Il est bien bon, Trochu!*"

Ludovica and Deodato went into the room in the Pavillon de Marsan where a cold meal had been laid out for the officials and friends who had remained at their posts to-day; but what appetite they might have was taken away by the clamour which penetrated into this northerly apartment from the Rue de Rivoli. From the window they could see the street packed by an excited crowd, which, like the one on the Place de la Concorde outside the garden-gates, included many members of the National Guard in their blue képis and uniforms or half-uniforms. It did not seem a very menacing assemblage, for its chatter was punctuated with cheers and frequent laughter. At a corner of the street was a tobacco shop with the usual official sign of the eagle and the Imperial monogram above its door. Two men had climbed a ladder, and amid the plaudits of the throng below were working to remove it with hammers. A neighbouring café was crowded with people joking, drinking the health of "Marianne" and toasting one another; while down the middle of the way a sort of procession slowly forged, singing, dancing, waving branches of foliage and rifles wreathed in green. Deodato heard many shouts of "*Vive Trochu!*" The whole scene was like a public holiday.

"Is it possible?" he murmured. "They are enjoying themselves!"

Look, Ludovica! On the wall yonder, still white, is the proclamation posted last night to announce the calamity of Sedan! It means that the whole country now lies open to the invader . . . that within a few weeks the King of Prussia will be knocking on the Gates of Paris! And below there, they are cheering and dancing because they have the chance to batter down a few crests from the walls! Ah! Paris! Paris! Have the gods made you mad?"

(2)

Anguished, the two made their way back to the Green Salon, hoping to learn what course the Empress had decided upon. Crossing the Marshals' salon they could see from the windows that the mob had now penetrated into the public garden. It was gathered at the farther end of the central avenue, listening to an orator. On the terrace before the Palace the shakoos of the Voltigeurs still gleamed rigidly. As they entered the Green Salon the door at the farther end opened, and the aide-de-camp, who was old Admiral Jurien de la Gravière, came through, as if looking for someone. Ludovica hurried towards him. "Pray let me enter, Admiral!" she pleaded. "And M. Caprano, who is here. Her Majesty would be cheered by his devotion!"

"Bring him in, if you wish!" answered the old man, with a gesture implying that nothing mattered now, and opened the door into the Rose Salon whence he had come, with its mockingly gay ceiling depicting the triumph of Flora and her maidens. In this room were gathered in a tearful group the chief ladies of the Court, with a handful of officials and loyal gentlemen. "You know, *Mme. la Duchesse*," said the Admiral, as he let Ludovica enter, "it is useless. The Empress is leaving."

His words were overheard by the little assemblage, and a murmur like a sigh of despair ran round the room. "Leaving? The Empress leaving!" Though all had known it to be inevitable, yet the definite announcement of the end of the Empire and the breaking of their careers fell on them like a sword-stroke.

A low hubbub arose. "Where is she going?" . . . "How will she escape?" . . . "The Palace is surrounded!" . . . "No, not yet!" . . . "Who will answer for Her Majesty's safety?"

"Messieurs! Mesdames!" The Admiral held up his hand. "I

cannot answer these questions. Her Majesty will communicate her wishes to you herself. Ah!"

The door from the Empress's cabinet had opened, and Eugénie appeared upon the threshold, simply dressed in black. She was deathly pale, with violet hollows round her eyes, which were blurred by weeping. But she moved with her usual imperial step, and her voice was strong as she asked for silence while her friends surged clamorously towards her. "My friends, my very faithful friends," she said; "the time has come to bid you farewell. I thank you . . . ah! with all my heart I thank you . . . for your loyalty; but you cannot help me now. I leave because I am no longer allowed to perform my duties. I have appealed to the Governor of Paris in vain . . . in France, you see, it is not permitted to be unfortunate. Now go, and look to your own safety. God bless you all!"

The habit of years worked, and the courtly group, with another deep sigh, bowed and backed out at the far end of the room.

"Duchess of Smolensk!" said Eugénie, "I have requested you to depart!"

Deodato stepped from behind the window-curtains, where he had for the moment concealed his presence.

"But your Majesty will not order *me* to depart," he said, kneeling and lifting the Empress's hand to his lips. "I owe you my life and my liberty, and you will allow me now to stay and face the last risks with you!"

"M. Caprano?" murmured Eugénie, "where have *you* come from?" She smiled wanly. "Still my paladin—in spite of everything? Well then, stay with me!"

She turned back into her cabinet, and Deodato, after a last hand-pressure with Ludovica, who nodded her approval, followed. He was surprised to find the two Ambassadors of Italy and Austria, Nigra and handsome, dark-whiskered Richard Metternich, waiting within.

"I implore your Majesty to make haste," said Metternich. "There is still time for the Chevalier and myself to guarantee your safety under our diplomatic protection. But," he glanced through the window, "once that mob out there breaks through the grille into the private garden we cannot answer for it."

From the bed-chamber came Madame Lebreton, the sister of General Bourbaki, the Empress's *Dame Lectrice*, carrying a cloak and a small hat with a thick veil, which she begged Eugénie to put on.

"We had best go by the staircase at the Pavillon de Flore

entrance," suggested Admiral Jurien. "There is always an aide-de-camp's carriage waiting at the little vestibule there."

"Stop!" said Metternich. "My coupé waits on the quay. I will go and bring that round. Better not take an Imperial carriage with its crest!"

He hurried off, while the Admiral and Deodato preceded the Empress and Madame Lebreton through a lamp-lit corridor at the back of the sleeping-apartments on to the staircase leading to the vestibule. Suddenly Metternich reappeared, waving his hands. "Back! Back!" he cried. "Don't let her Majesty descend! They are trying to break into the Carrousel!"

Deodato and Jurien ran down the stair into the vaulted portico, whence they could see a mass of people in the square beyond the railings, waving their arms, shouting, tugging at the gilded bars, and climbing up the sides of the Arch. The Cuirassier squadron wheeled and trotted round to the back of a company of infantry which had appeared in the court.

"They are not going to fire, Admiral!" exclaimed Deodato. "That would be fatal!"

"No! no!" answered Jurien. "See, they are shouldering arms! They are withdrawing. Someone has told them the Empress has left. Yes." He stepped out into the courtyard and looked up. "They are lowering the flag on the Pavilion of the Clock as a sign that the Palace is empty! Go back quickly, M. Caprano, and urge Her Majesty to make her escape through the Louvre! I will stay and parley with this crowd; they don't look savage!"

On receiving his message, the Empress without a word wrapped her cloak round her and set off through further corridors leading to the Pavillon de Flore. Metternich and Nigra escorted her, one on each side; Madame Lebreton held her hand; Deodato brought up the rear. Through apartments undergoing renovation for the Prince Imperial to occupy them, they passed into the brand-new Council Chamber, brilliant with fresh paint and gilding in the heavy rays of the September afternoon. At the door connecting the Tuileries with the Louvre they were brought to a halt, for it was locked and they had not the key. "*Allez!*" said the Empress calmly to Mme. Lebreton. "Find Thélín the Treasurer. He should be in the Stucco Hall by the Guard-Room. He has a pass-key." Mme. Lebreton ran off, and while waiting, Eugénie caught sight,

through a window, of the Pavilion of the Clock, with its tall flag-staff rising bare against the satiny blue sky and the tricolor lying crumpled on the slates at its foot—token of the evacuation of the Tuileries. Suddenly she began to sob, quietly, heart-rendingly.

The lady-in-waiting came scurrying back, bringing old M. Thélín, the Treasurer of the Palace, who with fumbling fingers unlocked the door with his pass-key, and let them through into the upper picture-gallery of the Louvre. Deodato alone heard the little door into the Palace close softly behind them, cutting Eugénie's life for ever into two.

The gallery was almost empty. A small family party of English tourists, undeterred by riot or revolution, was wandering round, and an aged female art-student sat by her easel, absorbed in copying. While the fugitives hesitated, one of the Guardians of the Louvre in his cocked hat strolled towards them enquiringly. Recognising the Empress through her veil, he uncovered and walked before her. They traversed in silence three more deserted galleries, smelling closely of varnish and polish; then the Empress stopped. "Leave us now, M. Caprano," she said. "I am anxious about Ludovica . . . and other friends. Go and help them, if you can: I shall be safe. You are a very faithful servitor. Go now . . . get well . . . and use your sword for France!" As he bent to kiss her hand for the last time he noticed that she was standing under Géricault's turbid canvas depicting the raft from the shipwreck of the Medusa.

"Hurry! hurry! for God's sake, Madame!" said Metternich. "Nigra and I will go on ahead and find my carriage . . . or a *fiacre* . . . anything." The diplomats disappeared and the two women followed.

For some minutes Deodato stood in a kind of stupor listening to the tapping of their little heels on the parquet, as they passed out of the room of the Shipwreck, and through the gallery leading to the staircase. Then, unable to obey his orders, he ran after, and reached the top of the stair just in time to see the two slight black figures pass at the bottom through the long vestibule crowded with images and relics of dead Egyptian dynasties, and turn into the blaze of sunlight that came through the glass-doors opening upon the square of Saint-Germain de l'Auxerrois. Then, chiding himself, he hastened back to obey the command laid on him. Returning, he crossed the Guardian in the cocked hat, who let him go by without a sign of recognition.

(3)

At the top of the staircase where the Empress had turned off to go through the Louvre a giant Cent-Gardes, rigid in his splendour, was still standing sentinel, his gauntlet clasped on his carbine.

Deodato thought it only fair to warn him. "You may leave your post, comrade," he said gently. "There is no one for you to guard now. The Empress has gone."

"There is no one there?" asked the burnished image, turning suddenly human. He had a reedy voice that contrasted oddly with his bulk.

"No one at all, Cent-Gardes!"

The sentinel lifted his carbine, and struck its butt sonorously on the stones in a departing salute. The sound echoed to the vaulted ceiling, and then ran through the enfilade of deserted State-rooms at his back. Depositing the weapon carefully against the balustrade, he clattered unarmed down the stairs in his huge boots and spurs. Deodato listened while the footsteps died away into silence. He recalled his first morning in Paris and the glittering escort of Mars he had watched proceeding down the Champs-Élysées to the Tuileries. Now the Palace seemed doubly empty . . . and as if waiting for its next occupant.

Deodato turned to make his way back to the salon of the Marshals. As he did so, he saw a short flunkey in a red livery and hair-powder at the entry to the obscure corridor leading to the Empress's deserted apartments. To him, too, he said, "You may go. There is nothing for you to do here."

The fellow did not move; he seemed not to have heard. Deodato moved towards him to repeat his advice . . . and he was not there! Deodato stepped back and looked about him; there was not a sign of the man. He passed his hand over his eyes—another of these troublesome tricks of vision! He walked to the opening of the corridor, and satisfied himself that he had been deceived by the folds of a crimson curtain with a white fringe to it.

In the vast salon of the Marshals he was overjoyed to find Ludovica waiting for him.

"Her Majesty!" she asked.

"She must have got away safely," Deodato told her, "or I should have heard the uproar outside the Louvre. What is happening here?"

Through the garden windows they could see that by an adroit manœuvre the gorgeous Voltigeurs had been replaced by a company of the National Guard in their unimpressive uniform. The private garden had been opened, and the mob was pouring through peaceably enough, pausing to admire the flower-beds before approaching the doors of the Palace.

"It is time for us to go too," said Deodato, taking Ludovica's hand, and casting a last glance round the magnificent ball-room, with its military portraits now in dust-cloths, its chandeliers in brown bags, and only the colossal bronze caryatides still seeming to watch and brood. He saw the place under the balcony where he had waited for Princess Waldoz the night of the great Court ball, listening to the gossip of poor old General Sertigues.

General Sertigues ! . . . Abruptly there came back to him the senile, cracked voice singing against the rhythm of the Strauss valse the legend of the Little Red Man.

With his nose in a hook,
And his cloven hoof,
At whose coming there cracks,
The Tuileries roof !

The little Red Man ! . . . The mysterious flunkey in knee-breeches he had glimpsed at the head of the staircase a quarter of an hour ago ? . . . Nonsense ! It was absurd ! . . . But suddenly the immense, sun-lit room took on an eerie look. It seemed full of noises, a rustling and swishing, a crackling. The fateful caryatides appeared to be bowing as if they could no longer sustain the burden of the balcony and the dome above it. . . . Deodato struggled with himself. What ! He who had inwardly mocked Ludovica for her superstitions, was he becoming the prey of phantasies too ? "Let us go, dear !" he said, "let us go !"

From underneath there came suddenly a low, rushing roar. "What is it ?" he asked. "*Nom de Dieu*, what is it, Ludovica ?"

"It is only the people pouring into the Palace," she answered. "We can mingle with them and make our way out quietly. They will not harm us ; there is no malice in them !"

Unmolested they passed out through the laughing, curious swarms on to the Place de la Concorde. Before them stretched the matchless vista of the Champs-Élysées, with the declining sun pouring through the distant vision of triumph, the Arch. Under the trees, as they

wandered along together, the usual Sunday throng seemed to be parading, lovers in pairs, infants in perambulators. There was rather more crowd, a good deal more gaiety than usual ; that was all.

On its customary grass-plot, with its usual audience of children, nursemaids in cherry-coloured streamers, poodles and other pet-dogs, the puppet-show of *Guignol* was vigorously proceeding. To screams of glee from the onlookers a demon-sprite was buffeting Polichinelle, causing him to rub his huge nose upon the plank of his little stage most dolefully.

" *Enfoncé ! . . . Enfoncé . . .* He's done for, Polichinelle ! " shouted the bellicose voices of small boys as the puppet collapsed in a heap.

" Yes," thought Deodato. " He's done for at last, poor Mr. Punch ! "

" *Vive Guignol ! . . . Vive Polichinelle !* " cried the children with careless fickleness.

END OF BOOK FOUR



BOOK V

Little Red Man

“ Il a le nez crochu,
Il a le pied fourchu.
Sa voix rauque en chantant présage
Au château remue-ménage.

Beranger.

"RIEN DE NOUVEAU!"

(I)

THE north wind swept with a biting edge through the blackness of the night, and despite their muffings the little group gathered round the electric searchlight on the heights of Montmartre shivered in the blasts that pierced the chinks of the earth-filled palisade behind which the new invention was installed. Overhead, the ancient Moulin de la Galette lifted gaunt arms against the faint stars. Below, the Place du Tertre, the little, provincial-looking square which was in gayer times the centre of the life of Montmartre, lay with its caf  s closed and shuttered, the songs of its artist population hushed; while by the light of a few petroleum lamps slung by ropes from house to house a battalion of the National Guard, No. 261, Montmartre, filled its space with a shifting, clinking, murmuring sound.

These citizen soldiers were of all ages, from young fellows who had in one way or another escaped enrolment into the Regular Army or the territorial Garde Mobile, to old men whose grey beards stuck out under the handkerchiefs, scarves, respirators and ear-pads with which they had sought to fortify themselves against the relentless wind of this end of October night. They made the oddest assemblage; of all classes, professions and shades of political loyalty; in a motley of costume, from the full uniform of the National Guard, blue k  pi and red-striped trouser, to blouse and k  pi only, or even top-hat or cap with cartridge-belt. The most envied were wrapped in sheep-skin coats; others covered their uniform, or lack of it, by overcoats, fur-collared or with worn velvet lapels; yet others had bed-quilts cunningly strapped round them by their wives. The poorest shivered in their thin blouses alone. All of them chattered, joked, grumbled and greeted their officers' orders with ironical cheers or argument, and there was a continuous restlessness, like that of an ant-hill, over the tiny, darkened square.

It was a further collection of these last-line warriors, consisting

largely of artists, journalists, authors and critics, which, with képis perched jauntily on flowing locks, watched curiously up by the Mill the novel device of a prominent electrician, the "land lighthouse," as it was called, which continuously turned its ghostly white finger over the panorama of Paris besieged.

It passed its strip of pallid radiance over a seemingly dead capital, a Paris crouched in darkness, its fountains of gaslight quenched, and only a minimum of yellow stars giving scattered indication of its streets and squares. For a moment the ray would transform to brightness the sombre mass of a dome, the charcoal stick of a spire, or throw up the detail of a block of houses on a remote eminence. Then, shooting forth a longer tentacle, it would traverse the zone of waste lands, half-rustic villas and squalid shack cities by the banks of canals and streams, which interposed itself between the heart of Paris and the fortifications, and would pick up the dusky rim of the ramparts with their projecting bastions, manned by the National Guard on a twenty mile radius. It lingered watchfully on the double-storeyed viaduct of the Point-du-Jour, where the Seine made its way out to the west through the girdle of the walls, and the red spark of an armoured train could be discerned, moving slowly across the upper arcade on the railroad that encircled the city just inside the fortifications.

Still higher the groping finger lifted itself, and strained to touch the region beyond the ramparts, the devastated war-zone created by the cutting-down of woods, the demolition of houses which might obstruct the fire from the walls. It struck upon the squat pentagons of the Forts of Vanves, Bicêtre and Ivry, links in the outer ring of defence which covered the Army of Manœuvre, France's remaining Regulars, including a Corps that had evaded the trap of Sedan, and the Garde Mobile. A faint aura hung round these forts from their inner lights, but no shots were being fired just now by the naval ratings who manned them with great guns brought from the warships. Then in turn the Forts disappeared, and the heights of Chatillon flickered into humped and spectral visibility. On these was entrenched the artillery of the Prussians, and below them, hidden by the night, stretched the lines of the besiegers, redoubt and earthwork, connecting sap and trench, fortified village, carefully guarded river, imprisoning the first city of Europe in hunger and cold and utter dearth of news, save what balloons and pigeons might bring, from the world outside.

But to-night the batteries of the assailants also seemed to slumber, and from the work that housed the searchlight a staff-officer clattered off to the Louvre, where General Trochu, Chief of the Government of National Defence and Military Governor of Paris, had his headquarters, with the message, “ *Rien de nouveau !* Nothing new ! ”

(2)

In an hour an order was brought back from the Louvre, and an officer in a sheepskin coat rose from a bench where he had been sitting by the searchlight, and made his way down the steps from the old Mill and into the Place du Tertre. It was Deodato, wearing the only uniform in which he had been permitted to continue his service to France during the siege of the capital. His arm, to which the use of a black satin sling at times was still a relief, had been too bad for him to be taken back into the active Regular Army, and a Staff appointment under the Governor of Paris was not to be hoped for in view of General Trochu's antipathy to notorious Bonapartists. So there had been nothing for him but to put his experience at the service of the National Guard in Montmartre, where he had returned to live at the Château des Zéphirs—for Cythère now lay empty and deserted among the felled trees of the Bois, and it was not thither that old Count Orlando's “ nephew ” had been able to bring home his wife, the former Duchess of Smolensk.

In Montmartre “ M'sieu Caprano ” was popular enough, as a frugal but regular payer, wealthy enough, it was known, to spend more if he wished ; and something of his service at Rezonville and Saint-Privat had percolated, in an exaggerated form that made a hero of him, into the wineshops and clubs of the district. Using its privilege of electing its own officers, the National Guard of the Butte Montmartre had voted “ M'sieu Caprano ” a *Sous-Lieutenant* ; and the Chief of his Battalion, a corpulent, lazy factory-owner of the Rue Marcadet, who had gained his proud position by the well-oiled voices of his workpeople, was quick to see in the ex-officer of the Imperial Guard a man on whom he could devolve the active work of his command. By the beginning of October Deodato found himself, unopposed, the Adjudant-Major of Battalion No. 261, and to-night he was in command of it, Colonel Bouteiller having caught a bad cold on the rampart a week ago.

The order brought back by an *estafette* from the Louvre was for

the battalion, already paraded in the square and impatient at its long wait, to march to the Place de la Concorde, there to stand by in readiness to cross, if required, to the Left Bank and reinforce the Southern sector covered by Forts Vanves, Montrouge, Bicêtre and Ivry. Actually there had been fighting that day on the opposite side of Paris, where the volunteer corps known as the *Francs-Tireurs* of the Press had seized the village of Le Bourget from the Prussian Guard itself—the cannon had been heard from Montmartre; and the urgent thing might have seemed to support this bold exploit on the north with all available forces. But General Trochu had been convinced by reports of spies (actually marauders in the gardens outside the walls) that the enemy meant to attempt a heavy diversion on the south side, and he had given orders that battalions of the National Guard should be drawn from other sectors of the city to stand by in support of those defending the rampart in what he believed the threatened area. The reported absence of the expected tokens of enemy activity in this region had apparently not changed his opinion, and this Montmartre battalion, instead of proceeding, as was customary, to the neighbouring section of the *enceinte* for its turn of watch, began a toilsome march across Paris.

It was a weird city they traversed between nine and ten o'clock, with every theatre and many of the restaurants and cafés shut; with no light but the sepulchral glimmer of rare gas-lamps, throwing into ironical relief the advertisements of dead gaieties and unobtainable luxuries on the blank walls; with no traffic, no groups of strollers on the once fashionable boulevards; but only a few women hurrying to night hospital duties, or some groups of National Guardsmen going off to their posts of assembly. They met no police; there was no need for them in these empty, echoing streets where neither prowlers, beggars nor suspicious loiterers any longer moved in the shadow of the houses or under the shrivelling autumn leaves. The only signs of life to be noted were at the entry to the various clubs, held in closed cafés and *Café-concerts*, in cellars and abandoned lecture-rooms—political criticism and oratory being the one, dangerous form of entertainment permitted by the Government during the siege. The whole of Paris to Deodato, as he tramped at the head of his men through the endless streets that stretched before him like a troublesome dream, seemed to be crouching and holding its breath, yet at the same time to be, behind its shuttered façades and in its secret meeting-places, intensely, menacingly alive.

(3)

How different was the sullen, smouldering spirit which he could sense from the exultation of those golden days of September, when, following the bloodless revolution at the Tuileries, the Republic had been deemed to have fallen from heaven ; and it had been held certain that the Prussians (still many miles away) would never dare to advance against a people intoxicated with Liberty, or, if they were driven to do so by their leaders, would inevitably fraternise with their opponents ! It had been *Badinguet* who had made war on Prussia, not the peasant or labourer or shopkeeper of France ! So there would surely be peace, or if not peace then speedy victory, since the driven soldiers of the dynasts could never hope to measure strength with the liberated masses of Paris and France !

Deodato had too much Italian realism in his make-up to share these Utopias, but he had had potent reasons of his own for yielding to the enchanting relaxation of one of the most marvellous Septembers Paris had ever experienced. The exquisite city had seemed to hang like a white mirage in the sparkling blue ; the sunshine was reflected in the faces of the promenaders awaiting joyous news from day to day ; and the leisurely preparations for a possible siege—the assembly of flocks and herds in the public spaces, the lines of tents along the Champs-Élysées, the Mobiles and National Guards drilling in the squares and Gardens, the motley francs-tireurs in their Tyrolese, Zouave and Calabrian bandit costumes—were all no more than part of a picturesque dream.

Ecstatic days, passed amid the crumbling eighteenth century grace of the little Château des Zéphirs with his wife ! Not even the licence accorded to war-marriages had excused Ludovica in the eyes of the Richard family for wearing her mourning for the late Duke only three weeks and marrying again at the end of them ! However, Smolensk's brother, a Judge of the Cour de Cassation, who had as hard and grasping a nature as Pierre's own, and his wife, who had always detested “ the Italian woman,” were too well content with her surrender to them of her part in the Duke's heritage to do more than strike her off the circle of their acquaintance as soon as the transfer had been signed ; and so at last, she felt, a long and dreary chapter in her life was closed.

Deodato, who had proposed to her a quiet wedding in Saint-Pierre-de-Montmartre, had been surprised to find her reluctant to ask the

Church's blessing and speaking of a civil marriage at the Mairie. Probing her trouble, he found that her violated oath on the relic of her family was in her eyes a self-inflicted sentence of excommunication. She was still, he realised, a Catholic believer in the full sense, unable to blur the outlines of her thought with his sensuous paganism or pantheism. Her orthodoxy excluded her from the Church; his latitude made him value the idea of a traditional consecration of their union. The red scarf of Dr. Clemenceau, the Mayor of Montmartre, starved his poetic instincts; it was not worthy of the kinswoman of the Beata, and at length he persuaded her to yield. But entranced though he was by the marriage rite performed in the gold-dust of the early autumn morning in the old village church of the Mount of the Martyrs, with its solid pillars and carved capitals taken from the former temple of Mercury upon the site, he was conscious of Ludovica's sombre disquietude. He discerned in her depths that his less reflective nature, with the touch of the carefree satyr in it, could not fathom.

Yet, whatever her compunctions, they had not chilled her ardours in the magic fortnight that had followed. The married lovers had passed these days alone in the sunny rooms of the little villa and under its engarlanding verdure, with the gimcrack Tour Solféрино lifting its striped summit from a pleasure-garden nearby. They were attended only by old Benedetta; lifted high above the murmurs of Paris; lulled in rural tranquillity among the windmills; with only the faint shrilling of bugles far below to remind them of the imminent, but incredible, peril of the city. Ludovica, during this intoxicating fortnight, seemed to shed the care she had shown on their wedding morning; to forget the burdens she had carried all her life; to relax from the uneasy strain of idealism that haunted her ever with the sense of a mission to be fulfilled, a sacrifice to be offered. She became pure woman, releasing the fires of passion that had so long been banked within her in a sort of reckless exultation. In the flame that she kindled in Deodato the whole world that was not her seemed to be consumed away.

If there was a crumpled rose-leaf beneath his bridal-bed it was not the surviving pain of his injured arm, which was rapidly improving, but the inability it imposed upon him to handle the clay or the modelling-tool and give shape to the palpitating visions with which his artist's soul was filled in this rapture of consummated love. The best he could do was to guide a pencil over the pages of

a sketch-book for preliminary studies of the creation that was stirring in him—a bacchante lying on a bank as if she had fallen breathless in a love-chase, one hand, above her head, still pressing the juice from a bunch of grapes, the other held to her panting breasts, her hair in a tangle, her mouth and eyes laughing up at the invisible pursuer in the maddest gaiety of life. All the joy of unashamed flesh had flowered under Deodato's tremulous pencil in this brief respite from care, and fulfilment, as from a divine cornucopia, of the yearnings of all his adult years. And it was while he was absorbed and lost one day in these sketches in the built-on studio of the villa, with its bay-window looking over the north of Paris towards the towers of Saint-Denis, that old Benedetta came puffing in, to cry in Italian to her master and mistress, “They are here—the Prussians! The baker's boy tells me the last railway line out of Paris was cut this morning by the Uhlans and the train had to come back! Now, my blessed Signorina” (she would never call Ludovica by any other title), “what is to become of us all?” It was the afternoon of September 17th.

Deodato had looked up from his drawings with a bewildered look; then he walked over to the window, and stood for a moment staring at the familiar view of the north part of the city across the ancient cemetery of Montmartre; at its tumble of blue and reddish roofs, its spires and green suburbs, tranquil under the laughing September sky. When he turned round again it was not the face of the transfigured lover or the blithe satyr, but the grim lineaments of the soldier of Rezonville and Saint-Privat that he showed to Ludovica, who was lying in a loose gown on the Oriental divan of the studio watching him. He walked slowly back, and closing the sketch-book snapped its clasp to with a click. For an instant an agonised apprehension filled Ludovica's eyes; then resignation dropped its shadow over them, and she exchanged with her husband a look that needed no interpreting.

Both knew without speaking what they would do. With scarcely a word they had intimated to each other at moments during their honeymoon what they purposed if the siege became a fact. Neither would desert France in this hour. As the early September days had floated by in their solemn grandeur neither had mentioned a train to Italy or a boat to England. She, he divined, after her brief outburst of revengefulness against Napoleon during the August days of decision outside Metz, had returned to her loyalty to the dynasty

and country that had made Italy free. From a phrase or two she let fall he had understood that she wished to offer herself—never could that longing for sacrifice be wholly stilled!—in reparation for King Victor Emmanuel's chilly egoism in letting his benefactor fall beneath the strokes of his enemies, while he prepared to annex Rome to his own crown. As for Deodato himself, the last words of his Empress to him had been, "Get well . . . and use your sword for France!" and even without that adjuration he would have felt bound to honour the traditions of his House. . . . That was why Ludovica now, on this October night, was working in a hospital in the Avenue Trudaine, and he was marching in his uniform of a National Guardsman through the gloomy streets on his way to the ramparts.

(4)

How high the star of Trochu had stood at the beginning of the siege! It was true that not much was known of his capacities, except that he had written a book on Army Reform and been an opponent of the Empire. But that was surely enough! He was the military genius who had been kept out of his place by the jealousies of courtiers and Court Generals—hadn't they said something of the same kind, though, about Marshal Bazaine?—and now he was the heaven-sent leader, known to have excogitated a marvellous plan for delivering Paris at the chosen moment from its beleaguers. As he had ridden with his impressive, domed forehead and elegantly-waisted figure along a three-mile review of the defending Army, old Regulars and new levies, stretching from the Place de la Bastille to the Arc de Triomphe, he had been hailed as a god by the populace. If he had not accepted, besides the supreme Command and the Governorship of Paris, the post of President of the Government of National Defence hurriedly formed on September 4th from the deputies of Paris, that junta of bourgeois lawyers and politicians would hardly have lasted a month. They had tried to enlist the services and reputation of M. Adolphe Thiers, whom Deodato used to meet at his father's villa; but that hoary-headed political gladiator had prudently declined to engage himself further than a diplomatic mission to rally the sympathy of neutral Governments to France in her distress.

Alas! the star of Trochu and his colleagues was already dim.

The wonderful “ plan ” had not yet been revealed, and the minor military operations that had been undertaken round the walls had been anything but successes. Although there must be thin places in the Prussian line of investment stretched round such a gigantic circuit as Paris, nothing like a determined effort had yet been made to break through and join hands with the new armies which, it was confidently believed, were being raised on the Loire to deliver the capital. Nor had the internal administration of the besieged city fortified the government in general esteem. The banning of amusements; the muddle of the rationing, whereby the poor waited in cues from before daybreak at the butchers’, while the wealthy had everything they wanted at their restaurants and only tried such weird meals as roast dogs, fricassee of rats, and elephant-steak from the Zoo for the sake of sensation, the threatening but feeble attitude towards the newspapers, had roused the exasperated and mocking spirit of the Parisians from its patriotic self-suppressions, and the departure by balloon of the only man of genius in the Ministry, the Jewish advocate Gambetta, who had gone to put fire into the Delegated Provincial Government at Tours, had been a still further, more fatal weakening.

That the Government had worse to fear than arm-chair criticism and guard-room grumblings Deodato knew as well as anyone. The proscribed Left extremists had flocked back to Paris on the fall of the Empire. The heads of the Internationale as well as the *vieilles barbes* of the Jacobin Republican tradition drove a relentless opposition in the clubs and in their newspapers. Veteran agitators, like Blanqui, Pyat and Delescluze, had each their own organ, and, what was more perilous, a field of bayonets in which to sow their propaganda, for the new battalions of the National Guard raised in the poorer quarters were openly hostile to the older bourgeois units which Napoleon III had sanctioned in the well-to-do regions of Paris only. Already there had been signs of insubordination in the working-class district of Belleville, where a wild-eyed, bronze-bearded, Jewish-looking individual, named Flourens, a former student of science, had grouped five battalions under his own leadership, extorted from Trochu the decorative title of “ Major of the Rampart,” and dared a week or two ago to lead his men under arms to the seat of the Government at the Hôtel de Ville, and demand more vigorous sorties, the *levée en masse*, and the election of a Commune to supply a popular municipal government for Paris.

When at length Deodato's battalion arrived to take up its position on the Place de la Concorde, which, with the Tuileries Gardens on one side and the Champs-Élysées on the other, made in these days a continuous camp and parade-ground, he found fresh confirmation for his uneasy suspicions. The National Guards, from Montmartre were placed between battalions from the Ternes region, the wealthy quarter bordering the Champs-Élysées, and the Saint-Germain battalion from that aristocratic faubourg. Their social standing was shown by their smart tunics, good shoes and the number of fur-coats among them. On the further side of the square under the flickering gas-lamps Deodato had noticed as he marched on to the Place that the Belleville detachment had equally been enclosed by the representatives of reliable bourgeois quarters. Clearly this assembling reserve was being organised so as to prevent the proletarian elements from coalescing ; and Deodato even wondered whether the whole scheme of withdrawing selected battalions from the different sectors for special work to-night might not have been devised less in expectation of an enemy attack than in apprehension of some concerted uprising in the plebeian quarters. Yet surely there was no immediate danger of a serious upheaval ? Ostensibly all parties, however critical, were still sinking their differences in a common patriotic support of the Government in office. The most extreme of the agitators seemed still to be limiting their demands to the more efficient prosecution of the defence by the men actually in power. Perhaps at this moment an impulse from some really daring leader would produce an explosion, but no such impulse had been given yet. Nevertheless there was undeniably tension in the atmosphere both here and in the quarters through which he had passed with his men. Was that tension really near to snapping ?

The 261st battalion, after establishing its position on the square, was permitted to break ranks for a short time while its members sought refreshments at the booths and canteens along the edge of the Champs-Élysées, or rested themselves wherever they could find a place, on a bench or the edge of a balustrade or even a kerbstone. They had found the march a trying one, though Deodato had done his best to reduce the number of elderly and infirm members in his battalion, just as he had done his best to expel the young political firebrands and to try to instil some rudiments of discipline. In all these endeavours, he reflected, as he strolled about the vast

place with its chattering ranks of citizen soldiery at ease, its echoing commands and rattle of rifle-butts on the stones, his success had been as mediocre—well, as General Trochu’s in his wider task.

“*Bonsoir, M. le Capitaine!*” Deodato glanced aside and saw that the salutation came from the man he had lately been thinking of, Major Gustave Flourens, tall, fiery-eyed, with his flowing bronze beard. The democratic Major wore his uniform with an Oriental splendour. His képi gleamed like an Imperial Marshal’s; a bright sash drew his military frock-coat foppishly in at the waist; he had patent-leather riding-boots, long spurs and a sabre that clanked behind him. Withal there was something indefinably unkempt and tatterdemalion about his figure, with its thin legs jerking him forward like scissors and his almost convulsive gestures. As Deodato coldly acknowledged his greeting (for he knew why Flourens always tried to court the Montmartre battalions), the Major plucked a cigarette from the bush of his whiskers as though it were a blazing coal, and exclaimed in a shrill, tense voice, “*Ça tourne mal, n’est-ce pas?* Things look bad, don’t they, my dear colleague? I thought I would come, though I was not convoked, to see what they mean to do with my brave boys from Belleville to-night. *Dame!* There’s no trusting these fellows! You know they have decided not to support our heroic francs-tireurs in Le Bourget? Also that they are keeping the worst news of all from the sovereign people of Paris? Look here, Captain!” He flourished a hand into his military breast, and drew out a fresh-looking, folded newspaper. “Read that, my friend!” he said with a gleam of fangs among his bronze hairs. “It is an advance number of Citizen Pyat’s *Le Combat*; in a few hours they will be digesting it on the boulevards. Just look at that, will you? . . . ‘*Rien de Nouveau*’ . . . *hein?*”

Deodato had moved under a gas-lamp to unfold the paper. Flourens made a dab at it with his forefinger that nearly went through the sheet. In immense black letters Deodato read:

BAZAINE’S TREASON!!!

Under this a few stabbing lines asserted that Marshal Bazaine had sent an officer to the Prussian camp to negotiate the capitulation of Metz in the name of the Emperor Napoleon III.

Deodato with a sick feeling crushed the paper back into the Major’s

fist and made excuses for hurrying away. Under the lamp as he turned he saw Flourens regarding him with malicious triumph, his carved nostril curling.

In a few minutes the 261st Battalion were called together again by blasts of the bugle, and a short while after midnight, directed by staff-officers of Trochu's, the various contingents were marching away towards the bridges, to take up their allotted stations near the ramparts on the south bank.

As the 261st tramped along, not without straggling, limping, and muttering at this renewal of their prolonged march (one or two "lawyers" proclaiming in voices meant to reach the Adjutant-Major's ears that it was illegal to move them from their own neighbourhood), Deodato pondered the fatal news he had just read. It meant the disappearance of France's last trained army—he recalled how he had had the premonition of this tragic issue on that broiling afternoon of August 18 in Plappeville village.

"Left, right . . . Left, right! Pick up your feet, men—*tonnerre de Dieu!*" They had emerged now by countrified tracts upon the desolate, half-built ring of the military boulevards, where every waste space was filled with tents, hutments and tiny *baragues* at which the chilled National Guardsman could warm his frame with *petits verres* as he came off his spell of duty on the ramparts. The wide road curved away under the glimmering stars—dotted on the one hand with little yellow lights from the encampments and the red glow of canteen fires; enclosed on the other by the black shape of the fortifications cutting the night-sky, with their hooded sentinels patrolling funereally. Light streamed from the casemate of a bastion, and from the number on the last one they had passed Deodato knew that this was Bastion 78, behind which they had orders to dispose themselves in support.

Before they could reach it there came a sound of horses and jingling scabbards, and a small cortège appeared from which an order was shouted to the 261st to halt. A voice called to Deodato to advance, and as he drew near to the muffled group he recognised from the presence of the *fanion* that the officer addressing him was none other than the Governor of Paris.

"Have you had any alarm in this sector, *Chef de Bataillon?*" asked Trochu. His bald dome showed pale in the gloom, and the dark streaks of his moustaches and chin-tuft began to define themselves.

Deodato explained that the battalion had only just arrived at the ramparts.

“Keep good watch!” Trochu impressed upon him. “The enemy may be preparing a disagreeable surprise for us! I want the reserves to be ready to move up at once if they break through the line of the Forts. You will have no sleep to-night, Adjutant-Major. . . . What of that? I have not slept for three nights!” He stooped from his saddle and almost whispered. “What about your men? Are they in good dispositions? These Montmartrois are turbulent.”

“In the 261st, *mon Général*,” answered Deodato curtly, “there is only one thought—*la Patrie*!”

“Good! good!” murmured the Breton General. “*Sainte-Geneviève et la Patrie*! that is our battle-cry”; lifting his eyes to the stars he crossed himself. “I will speak to your men!” he added, and rode across the road to the waiting ranks.

“Men of the 261st,” he cried in his clear, precise voice. “You have been summoned here to-night from your hearths and your well-beloved Hill of the Martyrs to undertake an arduous and perilous duty. Remember that should the Prussians storm the *enceinte* it is for you to make a second rampart of your dead bodies to protect your wives and children. I salute you!” He raised his képi as if in homage to heroes about to die, and trotted away briskly with his Staff along the curve of the fortifications.

As he vanished into the darkness an ill-natured titter which Deodato could not repress rose from the battalion.

“*Pas chouette, ça!*” declared a nasal voice. “A rampart of our dead bodies! Let the Regulars show the way!”

Deodato hurried them along to find the places allotted to them for the night in the huts behind the line; but as they went they broke into a song which was having a rage at the moment:

“Oh! our General Trochu is a wonderful man!
Our General Trochu has a wonderful plan!
Plan, plan; plan, plan!
Now what is his strategy, tell me who can?
I only know this: it's a marvellous plan.
Plan, plan; plan, plan; plan, plan, plan!”

(5)

It took Deodato nearly an hour to distribute his men in the section of huts temporarily allotted to them, and to compose their quarrels with the battalion already in possession, which had been ordered to squeeze itself to make room for the newcomers. When he had done this and posted guards, he betook himself (remembering Trochu's insistence on alertness) to Bastion 78 to glean any intelligence he could.

On entering the casemate he saw without pleasure, sitting in company with the officer of Mobiles who commanded the bastion, the Major of the Rampart, Flourens, who had, he knew, no business on this sector at all. He introduced himself to the Captain of Mobiles, who seemed an intelligent young fellow, and was invited to sit down. The Captain scouted the idea of an attack either in the still remaining hours of the night or at dawn. They had had no messages from the Forts indicating any signs of the activity that must precede such an operation. Major Flourens, for the sake of differing, rumped his streaming moustache and observed mysteriously.

"They will not attack the Forts at all, Citizen Colleagues."

"How then?" demanded the Captain.

"They will creep up between the Forts to the wall."

"Impossible! There are sentinels and searchlights. If they attempted such a surprise they would be crushed with converging fire from Montrouge and Bicêtre."

"Not the way they will come." Flourens folded his arms and shook his head portentously.

"Well, what way then, Major?" The Captain tapped irritably upon the wooden table round which they were seated.

"Underground, *parbleu!*" retorted Flourens. "Yes! that is their trick! They dig like ants, these fellows. They will make a sap right under the wall—a long tunnel . . . oh! I am a man of science and I know . . . and they will arrive in the heart of Paris, by the Madeleine or by the Opera."

The Mobile officer laughed. "In that case they need not do so much digging, my dear Major. They can use the quarries out here . . . the catacombs!"

"*The catacombs!*" Flourens sprang up with glittering eyes and smote the table a blow that shot both Deodato's and the Captain's

képis off on to the floor. “ That is what I mean ! ” (He had not in fact remembered the existence of the catacombs before the other mentioned them.) “ Captain,” he continued excitedly, “ I demand that we search the catacombs at once ! It is our duty ! ”

The Mqobile stared at him in bewilderment ; then he glanced across to Deodato with raised eyebrows.

“ Are there entrances to the city through the quarries ? ” asked the latter. He had only the vaguest hearsay notion of these relics of Roman Lutetia, which had played so many parts in the history of the south side of Paris. Originally hollowed out to supply the stone for building the city, they had been by turns abandoned, worked afresh, allowed to fall in, re-opened, employed by market-gardeners for mushroom culture ; and in the eighteenth century, possibly by deliberate imitation of their prototypes in Rome, been converted to purposes of sepulture, when the contents of the pestiferous Paris churchyards had been removed and piled up there in a macabre architecture of skulls and bones. Like their Roman prototypes again, they formed a labyrinth of which no one knew precisely the limits. Outside the walls they touched the Forts, inside they stretched at least up to the Place d’Enfer by Montparnasse.

Again Deodato enquired whether in fact the city could be entered through these subterranean orifices, and the Captain explained that no doubt there were many issues known only to quarrymen, market-gardeners and the cemetery attendants, but that since the War they had been, like the sewers of Paris, put under the care of a special Corps of Builders and Diggers, recruited from the sewer-men and quarry-workers, who might be trusted to keep a shrewd guard upon them.

“ In any case,” he added, “ if *M. le Major* is anxious, he has only to take a little promenade along the *enceinte* here to the Porte de Vanves, and he will find one of the entries in a pit nearby. There will doubtless be a sentinél and a guard.”

Realising that the Captain wished to be rid of his officious guest, and curious himself to see these famous places, Deodato agreed to accompany Flourens. He could at least find out if there was anything in his wild notion.

They had not far to walk, and from the guard at the Gate by Fort Vanves obtained a direction to the quarry. In a patch of wasteland the face of a hillock, topped by a row of crooked little cottages against the stars, had been carved out ; and the white gash

of the stone guided their stumbling steps to a wooden palisade protecting a tunnel-mouth in the face of the working. A sentry of the Diggers' Corps challenged them as they approached ; but on their explaining their business his Sergeant, who had been summoned, went to fetch the officer at a cottage converted into a guardhouse near by.

The officer, who had been in civil life a quarry superintendent, bade the Sergeant bring a lantern, and led them through the palisade down a long flight of roughly hewn steps into a cool, crumbling darkness.

At the foot of this stair, as they began to traverse narrow passages with rough stone sides, while the lantern in front woke goblin shadows that leapt upon the arched roof, it seemed to Deodato that time had indeed run backwards with him. As their shuffling feet went on over the gritty flooring he might have been a boy again, traversing the Roman catacombs under his conventual guides. There was the same dusty smell, the same bumpy surface underfoot, the same switch-back rise and fall in their course, the same black mouths gaping where side-passages branched off on this side and on that. After a while the corridor widened into a kind of grotto, ascending, as they could see when their guide held up the lantern, into a bluish dome. The Digger officer explained that this was a natural fault in the strata, one of many that heavily increased the risk of subsidences. For an instant (he knew not why) Deodato had an eerie feeling that the witch-like figure of Madeline might suddenly appear, beckoning him from one of the inky openings into this cavern—then he remembered that he had taken what he had hoped to be his farewell of that female poisoner in the artificial cavern of the Colosseum in Regent's Park. . . .

They went on through more passages, and stopped at last outside a doorway with a heavy stone lintel like a cromlech. The guide held up the lantern for them to read on this stone the inscription :

STAY! HERE BEGINS THE EMPIRE OF DEATH!

He explained as he unlocked the door with a key from the bunch at his belt that they were now leaving the quarries for the catacomb proper, the cemetery. Deodato heard Flourens' teeth chatter as they resumed their wandering between walls of brown human bones striped in a regular pattern with rows of skulls too pathetically

worn even to grin, varied by skeletal designs of a sombre irony, the moral of which was pointed out by pious sentiments in black paint, phrased with the elegance of the eighteenth century. Deodato, for all his familiarity with catacombs, felt under this concentrated assault of mouldering death a certain sympathy with the horror of the revolutionary at his side, whose terrestrial Utopia was being so grimly challenged.

At length they saw more lights ahead, which shone, disappeared and shone again, as the passages twisted, and opened confusing slits upon the elusive glimmer; and at last they emerged upon a space near the stair to the Place d'Enfer where several of the subterranean roads met, and where a corporal and three or four men of the Diggers' Corps had established a guard-post with their rifles piled in a pyramid. At Flourens' urgent prompting, the officer strictly questioned this Corporal, a grizzled old quarryman, about the possibility of penetrating under the fortifications through the catacombs.

His answer was surprising. “But they are always coming in and out, *mon Capitaine*!”

“You say?” asked the officer incredulously, while Flourens drew a singing breath.

“I say . . . without offence . . . that the vegetable men and marauders and *mauvais types* of all sorts are always passing through, and some of them make their nests in the outer galleries. How do you want us to stop them, *mon Capitaine*? There are four miles of the quarries that I know of . . . and how many more I do not?”

“But they cannot get into the cemetery?”

The old quarryman shrugged his shoulders. “Who knows? We have done our best to wall it in where we can, and make barriers where we can not. But they get through all the same . . . like the rats! Listen to them, *mon Capitaine*!” He held up his hand, and the meaning of a squeaking, scurrying noise which Deodato coming along had taken for a play of echoes was revealed.

“But the Prussians?”

“They cannot get past the Forts! In any case we are on the alert. We should hear them tramping . . .! The others, we do not worry, so long as they do not come too close. *Tiens, mon Capitaine*, and you gentlemen, come with me! I daresay you will be able to hear them at this moment! Don't bring the lantern. It shows—you would never believe how far.”

He unhooked an iron fence that barred off a low passage, and invited them to duck and follow him into the darkness. They crowded after him, and a sudden clink of their swords shamed them by the betrayal that they were huddling together for fear of being lost. The old man hushed them, and with joined hands they shuffled behind him as noiselessly as they could for what seemed a mile in the eerie blackness. "Now," he whispered hoarsely, "this is another *carrefour*; you can hear down six passages. Come, *M. le Capitaine*!" He laid his hand on Deodato. "Lie down with your ear to the ground and listen!"

Deodato complied, while the others kept still as mice. In a moment as he pressed his ear to the surface, smoothing away the litter of stone fragments, the distance became clamorous with noises. He heard the rats rustling; he heard what sounded like a distant drip of moisture; the fall of a little cataract of bits from some roof; and then . . . was it a footfall . . . the ghost of a footfall . . . the echo from a drip . . . a throb in his strained eardrums, transformed by imagination? He felt ashamed to decide, and as he rose, dusting his knees, "I cannot tell," he said curtly.

They felt their way back thankfully to where the light glimmered to meet them, and looking at their faces the old man grinned. "You can hear anything you think in the catacombs," he told them. "But, have no fear! We are on the alert. They will not get far, if they try to come in a crowd!"

He let them out by a short cut at the staircase in the Rue Dareau. A sentinel was posted at the street entrance, and Flourens bade him "redouble his vigilance!"

"That's my affair!" said the Digger officer, who seemed unimpressed by the rank of "Major of the Rampart."

Deodato thanked him, and walked back with the Major to the *enceinte*. In Bastion 78 the Captain of Mobiles was writing out his report. "*Rien de nouveau*!" he said briefly, and smiled when they made their equally empty summary. Deodato looked at his watch; it was just after four o'clock.

The rest of the night he spent dozing uneasily on a hard bench in the casemate, vaguely conscious of the cries of the sentries on the ramparts overhead:--*Sentinelle! Garde à vous! . . . Qui vive? . . . and Ronde Major!* with its trampling of feet. He was more completely disturbed by Major Flourens, who two or three times

between then and morning sprang out of the arm-chair in which he was resting like a Jack-in-the-Box and darted up to the rampart above. But nothing followed these excursions.

Deodato at last fell into a solid sleep, from which he was roused by the bugles sounding a muffled *diane* through morning mists. He stepped out upon the rampart and found all quiet. The haggard sentinels still paced; the black snouts of the guns in the embrasures loomed like prehistoric animals; beyond the parapet a rolling white bank hid the view of the Forts. Turning to the east Deodato beheld a strange phenomenon.

The rising sun had suffused the mist-curtain which was hiding it with a flood of red light that filled all that area of the sky with a blood-coloured vibration. It hung like a veil over the eastern quarters of Paris, shrouding them from sight, and deadened the sounds of the early day with its mantling solemnity. It seemed to cast an unreality upon the whole scene, as though it were a war of spectres.

A clink of spurs announced the *lever* of Major Flourens. With his feathers crumpled by the night, his spiritual squalor was even more pronounced. He yawned cavernously through his entangled beard, and gave Deodato an effusive invitation to stay his stomach against the morning chills with “a little glass” at the nearest canteen. Deodato excused himself on the ground that he must immediately attend the roll-call of his men. His private opinion was that (though Flourens needed no alcohol to intoxicate himself) far too many excuses for drinking were made by the garrison of Paris—drink being the only commodity of which there was no shortage in the siege.

About an hour later an order arrived from Headquarters bidding the 261st and the other battalions fetched from distant parts of Paris to return to their quarters. Signals and messages from the Forts had reported that all was quiet on the outer ring of the defence. Deodato, scraping his unshaven chin with his hand while the Sergeants checked off their sections, had too much of the training of the professional soldier to feel annoyance at the fruitless marching and watching of the night. He only felt a dull disappointment that once again no move had been made by themselves or the enemy to bring decision nearer. *Rien de nouveau* had once more proved the end as it had been the beginning of their activity. “All present and correct, *mon Capitaine!*” reported the Lieutenants, and in a few

minutes the feet of the Montmartre men were dying away into distance along the squelching, damp roads towards the interior of the city.

(6)

It was just at about the time of their departure that the officer of the *Soldats de Bâtiment et de Terrassement* who had acted as guide to Deodato and the Major in the catacombs during the night was again roused by the Sergeant from the quarry, this time with an excited mien. His news was startling. The sentries at the foot of the descent at this point had made a capture of a suspicious character in the passages, and were holding him to be interrogated.

The Digger officer buttoned his tunic and hurried to the spot. At the foot of the crumbling stairway lanterns gleamed on the faces of a group of soldiers surrounding a man with a black slouched hat and a wedge of wiry black beard. He tried to speak as soon as he saw the officer, but the latter silenced him till he had listened to his captors' story. They had heard, it appeared, the footsteps of more than one man approaching, and had crept out by side-passages known to them and tried to cut off the intruders' retreat. One had scurried away, dropping a bag filled with vegetables; the other, who could not give the password, they had seized and brought to their Sergeant. They were very excited and pleased with themselves.

"Did this fellow resist?" asked the officer.

"Why should I resist?" interrupted the stranger. "I am a friend, who has made his way into the city by the only passage open to him."

"Who was the man with you?" demanded the Digger officer.

"My guide, *parbleu*! Do you suppose I know my way through this labyrinth? He is a robber of gardens, I suppose; but without him I should not have come safe through the lines—that is all."

"Your name and papers?"

"My name is Sambellini. My papers were taken from me by the Prussians at a village out yonder . . . I don't know what it is called . . . before I escaped from them."

"You are Italian, Monsieur?" The officer's voice softened. Italians were popular in Paris since it was known that Garibaldi was organising a Legion to come to the aid of France.

The man bowed. "Italian. And I have voyaged from England to fight for France. I can give some news too," he added.

The officer was perplexed. "Why did you not present yourself at the Gates in a regular fashion, M. Sambellini?"

The other shrugged his shoulders impatiently. "Don't I tell you? I had to wriggle through the Prussian lines as best I could."

"That is impossible!" growled the Sergeant. "Not a mouse could get through their lines unobserved."

"It seems then that I am smaller than a mouse . . . or more intelligent . . . Figure it for yourself, Monsieur!" He turned to the officer. "If their outposts had started firing at me, your Forts and patrols would have replied. Friends are as deadly as foes to a man in my position. In a ditch I was overjoyed, I may tell you, to find that excellent marauder, who knows the quarries like the back of his hand. We entered somewhere, I believe, by Fort Vanves. We wandered for hours . . . for some time among skulls. I don't know where I am now. I presume inside the walls? But I am unarmed . . . and not in the least a dangerous character. You have really no reason, Monsieur, for not letting me go and get some breakfast, which I need. Perhaps you will do me the honour of breakfasting with me?"

"It's all lies," whispered one of the soldiers to another. "He is a spy. The Prussians passed him through!" The Sergeant bade him hold his tongue.

"I regret, Monsieur," said the officer, "that I must take you under escort to the Governor of Paris, to be interrogated. You may be all right . . . but you have neither papers nor the password . . . and your entry is irregular. Follow me, if you please."

As the strange visitant came blinking up from the underworld into the light of what was now a dull October morning with a leaden sky no longer irradiated by the mysterious glow of the dawn, he and his escort saw passing along the road that edged the quarry-pit a scarecrow figure mounted on a lean horse, the early breeze lifting the bronze mat of its beard. This rider, at sight of the group, reined in and waited for them to come up.

"May I ask the name of that officer, Monsieur?" enquired M. Sambellini.

"It is the Major of the Rampart, M. Flourens from Belleville," answered the Digger Officer curtly.

"Ah! . . . May I be permitted to speak to the Major?"

The Lieutenant looked doubtful, and at that moment Flourens,

riding up, demanded with his usual air of authority to know who the prisoner was.

While the Digger, who resented Flourens' perpetual intrusions, hesitated to answer, the stranger took it on himself to reply, and his reply was eccentric.

"I come, *M. le Major*," he said in a clear voice, "from the good cousin of *Mme. La Veuve*"; and as Flourens gave a little start he raised his left arm, the hand of which he had all through his interview with his captors kept hidden in the pocket of his long paletot, into the air in a stiff salute.

A murmur ran through the group of soldiers. "*Manchot!*" "*C'est un manchot! . . . Only one hand!*"

Flourens passed his fingers through the mesh of his beard, and then said to the Lieutenant. "You may surrender your prisoner to me. I will lead him to the Louvre myself for examination."

The Digger paused. He reflected that it meant sparing his men and himself a tramp of miles into Paris; that Flourens, after all, had a horse and he had not; and that he was really as free to look upon the "Major of the Rampart" as a superior officer with a right to command him as he had been to consider him an interloper without regular status. He fell to temptation.

"You will give me a written discharge, Major," he said; and Flourens, with his teeth gleaming all over his face, wrote a receipt for the prisoner with a gold-cased pencil in a morocco-bound note-book, and tore out the leaf with a flourish.

The little group of *Soldats de Bâtiment* watched the two moving slowly off towards Paris. The Major was leaning from his saddle listening intently, while the man with the one hand talked, with his face uplifted and his black beard wagging. They diminished along the untidy road, going to meet the domes of the Val-de-Grâce and the Invalides dully glinting.

From somewhere near the ramparts a church-clock struck eight; the next moment came the shriek and crash of shells exploding over Fort Vanves, and the roar of the naval guns replying.

"You see?" said the obstinate soldier to his Sergeant. "They gave him till eight o'clock to get through in safety." He shook his head. "*C'est louche! Dirty work!*"

"*F . . . moi la paix!*" said the Sergeant rudely. "They always begin at this time! *Rien de nouveau!*"

CHAPTER TWO

AT BAY

(I)

"WHAT do you believe, Deodato?" asked Ludovica. Her husband had stepped back for a moment from the life-size figure on which he had been working in all his intervals of duty for the past six weeks, ever since his arm and hand felt strong enough to undertake the toil. With the aid of two trained sculptor's workmen, whom he had found among his own battalion of the National Guard, in making the armature and other heavy preliminaries, he had progressed beyond his hopes by this first week in December. For a little while, seeking to fix in thought a shade of expression he desired to impart to the eyes of his statue, he did not answer Ludovica.

She was watching him with troubled eyes from the divan. Like the other Oriental accessories brought from Deodato's old studio on the Left Bank—the hanging copper lamp, the stands of scimitars, the Algerian shawls draped over the arm-chairs—this had the tawdry look of yesterday's fashions in the stark light of the winter afternoon, and contrasted with Ludovica's black dress, her Red Cross armlet, and the woollen comforter she was knitting for trench-wear by some Garde Mobile. Equally incongruous was all that faded romanticism with the face of Piero Santacroce, or Sambellini—as he now chose to call himself—who lolled against a corner of the bay-window overhanging Paris—a Paris still and bluish under a mantle of snow, with dingy, unpainted buildings and roofs drained of their colours. The sky was a pewter cope big with more un-fallen flakes. Within the studio a parsimonious fire flickered in a grate economically narrowed with bricks.

As Deodato continued silent, Piero glanced across at him and observed, "There's some life at last in that 'machine' of yours, brother-in-law. The tiger-cat looks ready to scratch!"

In fact, the figure on which the sculptor was brooding seemed to rise from its socket as if about to take a flying leap upon an enemy. Though still rough and skeleton-looking in parts, its character was clear. It represented an Amazon in a winged helmet, naked save for the wisp of a torn tunic clinging to her hips and knees, and with a quiver holding a last arrow over her shoulder. In one hand she clenched a broken sword reversed for use as a dagger; the contracted toes of her advanced foot trod upon the pieces of her bow. The glaring eyes, the starved cheeks, the lips curled in a rictus of hate, all contributed to give the figure its menacing force, as of a projectile about to be launched in desperate destructiveness.

Piero sniggered. "Hardly consoling for a respectable drawing-room, that *bougresse*! You will frighten the customers, my Deodato!"

"It is designed for a public building," answered Deodato shortly. "If one can be found to accept it. For a cornice, perhaps."

Piero walked over to the grate, and lit a cigarette with a spill. "If," he said, straightening himself, "there are still public buildings . . . of *your* sort, my friend . . . when this business is over. And what do you call your pretty spit-fire?"

"*Paris aux abois*—Paris at bay," replied the sculptor.

"Deodato!" persisted Ludovica. "You have not answered my question yet. What do you believe?"

"About what? . . . About the *sortie*?" He turned and faced her, rubbing pellets of clay from his palms, his furrow bulging, his expression harassed. "I believe," he said, "that it was a failure . . . and that soldiers must bear failures without complaining."

There was a silence in the chilly studio. None of them felt more than Deodato himself the inadequacy of his comment on the fearful stroke that had fallen upon shivering, hungry, exhausted Paris in the last few days. A great operation, planned to effect a breakthrough in the line of the investment by Champigny on the Marne and a juncture with the French Army of the Loire, had collapsed after four days heavy fighting and cruel bivouacking in frost and snow—not through any failure on the part of the men, Regulars or Mobiles, but through muddled plans, through hesitating command. To the Parisians, fighting another battle in their homes and streets against the bitterness of an exceptionally early winter, with food-supplies now cut to the minimum, light reduced almost wholly

to the glimmer of petroleum lamps, and fuel practically unobtainable, the news as it filtered through the fortifications, past the desolate outskirts into the melancholy boulevards, had come as a numbing blow. Where now were they to look for hope?

"Deodato!" Ludovica had finished her knitting, and was restlessly stabbing the wool-ball with a needle. "Do you believe General Trochu is really fit for his task?"

Deodato made a despairing gesture. "What do I know, dearest? . . . All I know is, he is our commander; we are his soldiers."

"*Plan, plan; plan, plan; plan, plan, plan!*" hummed *le Manchot* derisively.

"Be quiet, Piero!" Ludovica's eyes flamed with something of her old, sisterly authority. "I want to know what to think! Deodato, you do not see all I do. I have to watch these poor fellows agonising and dying in the ambulances, in the hospital . . . day after day . . . night after night . . . and I say they have a right to be *led*! Not to be slaughtered like sheep . . . Why are we not led to victory in an irresistible wave—all of us?"

"You too, little sister?" scoffed Piero.

"Why not?" she answered tranquilly, rolling up her knitting. "I should not be the first woman in French history to wear a sword."

"*Les Amazones de la Seine, alors?*" He made tittering reference to a crazy scheme lately extinguished by the Government.

"The people," Ludovica reiterated, with her cheeks flushing, "should not be killed to no purpose!"

"We will show them a purpose!" said Piero, "and very shortly now!"

Deodato wheeled on him, glad to find a vent for his anger. "The same purpose, doubtless, that you and your friends disclosed on the last day of October . . . It was a bitter disgrace to Paris . . . fighting among ourselves in the face of the enemy!"

On October 31st, only four days after Piero Sambellini's subterranean entry into Paris, there had been a general uprising among the democratic battalions of the National Guard, and Gustave Flourens had led his Belleville legion to the Hôtel de Ville, stormed it and burst into the very council-chamber where Trochu and his Ministers were assembled. All that day the members of the Government had been held prisoners by the armed mob in their chairs,

while Major Flourens capered up and down the table at which they sat in his spurs, declaiming till he was voiceless, and exhorting his supporters to draw up a list of new rulers and scatter it from the windows among the crowd. Not till nightfall had loyal battalions of the National Guard burst into the Town Hall by an underground passage and raised the undignified private siege of the Government. It had been a shock to the moral and cohesion of the capital from which the Parisians had not recovered . . . and Deodato had a shrewd conviction that the volatile Flourens would never have dared attempt such a *coup d'état* without a firmer will at his elbow, a more ruthless mind shaping his own.

Piero read his brother-in-law's thoughts, and seemed not the least abashed. "No doubt," he sneered, "true patriotism consists in being scientifically butchered like sheep. '*Plan, plan; plan, plan*,'" he hummed again defiantly.

"Piero," demanded Deodato, "may I ask you a question?"

"Twenty, if you wish, *fratellino mio*!"

"Did you come to Paris to help us fight the Prussians, or to taunt us into flying at one another's throats?"

"He came here . . . at the risk of his life . . . to help us!" said Ludovica reproachfully.

"I came here to organise the *sortie en masse*!" declared Piero. "But how can you fight the Prussians with these defeatists . . . these *capitulards*?"

"Halt, there!" interrupted Deodato. "Trochu has sworn never to capitulate while he is Governor of Paris!"

"Then let him fight—better than he did at Champigny! . . . But you know the truth very well, my friend. Trochu does not believe in victory; he does not believe Paris can resist from within or be relieved from without. He only closed the Gates as a gesture, and nobody was more disconcerted than he when after a week Paris was still holding out."

"*Vrai?*" Deodato lifted his eyebrows.

"Perfectly true, and it was not for want of better information. As soon as I entered the city I made my friend Flourens take me to Trochu to vouch for me and enable me to tell him what I had observed on my passage through the Prussian lines. They are sick of the siege, and prepared at any moment to have to pack up and go and meet the Army of the Loire. A man with any fire in his belly could make an end of them in a week."

"How did you find all this out?"

"By using my eyes and ears in their lines, quite simply."

"Why did they let you use eyes and ears to their disadvantage?"

"They took me for a neutral. I travelled to Epinay with a British passport."

"And when they came to suspect you and took your papers away, as you said?"

"I have not been a conspirator for fifteen years without learning how to worm my way through a cordon of spectacled German sentries."

"And suppose your famous *sortie en masse* . . . by an untrained rabble . . . were to fail—as it would?"

Piero blew out a ring of cigarette-smoke. "The world will not end because Trochu and his puppets are in the mud," he said carelessly.

"*Nous voilà, enfin!*" said Deodato, turning back with disgust to his statue.

"There will always be the Commune!" declared Piero.

"What is the use of that sort of talk?" demanded Deodato, without turning round. "We cannot make yet another Revolution with the King of Prussia's fingers on our throat! What is this 'Commune'? . . . A dream!"

"A dream of justice! Justice for all!" Ludovica had spoken in a deep voice, and Deodato whirled round astounded, to see her eyes lit with the fire he knew well when she was seized by an ideal, her hands clasped and trembling over her bosom.

"You, too, believe that, Ludovica?" he asked gently. "My dear! . . . I am surprised!"

"It is not quite a new idea, is it?" she asked him, defensively. "Mazzini, Garibaldi, my old teacher Canon Visconti, believed in something like it. Equality! . . . Oh, Deodato! Have not you and I seen enough of the work of Emperors and Kings?"

"And of the bourgeois!" added Piero. "Lawyer-politicians! Generals trained in the school of royalty and piety! The basket waits for them!"

Deodato hastened to finish the part of the face he was working on before the quick December dusk. But his thoughts and fingers were distracted. He was alarmed at the influence her brother seemed to be gaining over Ludovica. With all his heart he cursed the malice of Fate that had prevented him from stopping Piero's

entrance into Paris. What a capricious pattern Destiny had woven of their relations ! Once in his ignorance he had released *le Manchot* from the catacombs upon the world ; now he had risen a second time from the underworld, infinitely more dangerous and menacing, and Deodato by an hour or two had not been there to check him . . . Possibly he had even heard his footstep while he was listening at the dark *carrefour* with the Digger Sergeant ! An hour or two had made the difference ! Before Ludovica could know of her brother's arrival Deodato would have haled him before the Governor of Paris and had him sent back to the Prussians, who (there was no doubt) had sent him into the city to spread his poison. Even if he had approached the Gates in the ordinary way he might have been identified and arrested—but he had had to fall in with the crazy enthusiast Flourens, who was wax in his subtle Italian hands !

Deodato could not forbid him the villa, but he suffered from his presence. He seemed to spend all his time there when he was not out and about Paris doing his work. His energy and tenacity, his power of incitement and persuasiveness at least must be admired by a brother Italian. His years spent in the haunts of the Internationale in England and Switzerland had immensely increased his power and suppleness. In the five weeks since his coming, ever pulling strings behind the scenes, *le Manchot* had effected something like a revolution within the Revolution. Not only had he defined a policy for hot-heads like Flourens ; he had laboured tirelessly to bring the varied revolutionary elements in the city to harmony and co-operation, acting as intermediary between the Committees of Vigilance of the different districts, the Socialists of the Internationale, the Radical journalists like Félix Pyat or the grim old Jacobin Delescluze, and the various organisations of the National Guard, from which his keen eye saw the possibility of creating an armed power that could bring the existing Government of Paris to terms. Already he was busy promoting a Federation of the National Guard Battalions, with a Central Committee, which should turn the force into the instrument of the new Revolution ; and it was no wonder, his brother-in-law thought, that he should often totter into the Château des Zéphirs exhausted and hoarse from his endeavours.

A touch on the arm roused Deodato from these musings. Ludovica was standing beside him peering at *Paris aux abois* with her

short-sighted look in the decaying daylight. "It is marvellous!" she murmured. "*Caro mio*, you have never before put such power into any work of yours!"

"I have put into it," he answered, in a low, vibrant tone, "all my indignation . . . all my revolt!"

She started and looked at him with puzzled eyes. "You are indignant? You are in revolt? You have seemed so aloof lately . . . so wrapped up in your statue, as if nothing else in the world mattered. . . . And the other night I was turning over the leaves of your Battalion Order Book. And it was filled with sketches of wounded and dying men you have seen passing in ambulances or on stretchers, drawn as if they were mere stone figures and only their muscles and distorted faces interested you!"

Deodato looked at her a little bewildered. "But, *carissima*, I cannot help it. . . . I cannot help seeing things so. . . . You are saying in effect what the policeman said that day in London docks, 'A heartless fellow!' . . . And yet I do not believe I am without a heart! . . . And if I dared speak (but I am a soldier and I must not) I would cry very loudly how the conduct of our rulers revolts me!"

"But, *mon ami*," she asked, "why did you frown so on me just now because I was driven to revolt, too?"

"Because," he looked at her sidelong as he wrapped a damp cloth round his figure, "I fear . . . I fear——"

"What do you fear, beloved?"

"Ludovica, you have never given yourself by halves yet to any object of your passion. God, Italy, I myself . . . most unworthy . . . have had the whole of you, without thought or reserve. If now you are persuaded to turn against discipline, without which no victory can be won; against social order, without which all civilisation, all art collapse, and man returns to the beast——"

"Who says I will do that?" she cried in genuine surprise. "Who urges me to any such madness?"

Her husband could not refrain from pointing a silent finger at her brother, who had returned to his post of observation by the window, and with the stump of his mutilated arm, while he smoked, was idly rubbing the window-pane. In Deodato's fancy he seemed to be gradually, methodically smearing out the panorama of snow-bound Paris, fast disappearing already in the bleak twilight, unlit by the disused gas-lamps that stretched idly along the boulevards.

(2)

Often Deodato recalled that gesture in the ensuing weeks, as they dragged past, each minute an hour, in growing darkness as the last twigs of fuel gave out, increasing hunger as the store of rations implacably dwindled, gathering revolutionary ferment as Trochu issued his smooth proclamations and sat still in the Louvre. The spectre of Christmas passed without gifts or greetings, and with the New Year a fresh terror blazed upon the haggard Parisians. The Prussians, enraged by the stubborn refusal to capitulate, declared that their patience was exhausted, and their siege-batteries began to bombard the civil quarters of the city, shattering monuments, eviscerating private houses, tearing women and children to crimson shreds upon the winding-sheet of snow. More and more furious grew the demand for the *sortie en masse* by the National Guards, disturbing their new commander, a fat, grey-bearded veteran of civic soldiering, General Clément Thomas. He nodded when into the drooping ear of Trochu some one whispered the word "*Saignée!*" . . . Let them be bled, since they demand it! Perhaps afterwards they will see reason and accept . . . the inevitable. "I have sworn that the Governor of Paris will never capitulate!" Trochu asserted again, and sat down to draw up plans for a final attempt to break through. . . .

January 20th.—A weeping dawn hung over the smokeless city. From the western ramparts the muffled, raw-nosed citizen soldiery looked out over felled trees and wastelands drowned in slush and puddle. Beyond the drizzle, Fort Mont-Valérien on its height bellowed like a great beast in agony; and through all the western gates, Auteuil, Passy, la Muette, Dauphine, Maillot, the ambulances jolted in a dreary procession, their horses splashing and slipping in the coat of mud which there were no street-cleaners to shovel away; their crosses shining like blood that cried for vengeance; a stream of orderlies and staff-officers with furred jackets tightly buttoned passing them by on chargers that were all ribs like Dürer mounts of Death. The crowds that had collected round the Gates and the sentries on the walls saluted their fallen comrades with death in their own faces and death in their hearts. The last sortie yesterday by Buzenval had suffered check; in the night Trochu had accepted it as mate. The turbulent National Guards led

out to participate, as a lesson, had had their bleeding. It was the end. . . .

The leaden December sky closed early upon Paris ; it seemed to clamp the hideous depression down upon the city. The silent streets were like the walks of a cemetery ; the faces of the inhabitants longer, more tragic than they had ever been before. Since ten in the morning even Mont-Valérien had ceased its thunderous moan ; Trochu had demanded a two-days' armistice to collect the dead and wounded, terrifying Paris with the false vision of a massacre more terrible than the greatest battles of history. Upon Ludovica, as she left her hospital just after nightfall at the end of her spell of duty—some wounded but not many had come in there—the gloom fell crushing her spirit. As she had set out in the early morning for the Avenue Trudaine she had been wrung by the spectacle of the queues awaiting the opening of the butchers' shops, poor women in thin shawls and holed boots who had been standing in the slush for hours, without complaint, in the hope of a chunk of ill-smelling horse-meat. The first part of her duty in the hospital had been with sick children of the slums, victims of siege-living ; the latter hours had been occupied in tending the maimed National Guards who had arrived from the chaos of the mismanaged battle. She was relieved from personal anxieties ; for she had learnt during the night that Deodato, who had marched out yesterday at the head of a *Compagnie de Guerre* formed from the fittest members of the 261st Battalion, had through a tactical blunder been compelled to pass the hours of the battle shivering with his men under the park-wall of a little château near Rueil and had not been under fire. But her own good fortune made the sufferings of others more intolerable to contemplate. Must these humble ones of the earth always be crucified by their incompetent masters ?

At the foot of the Rue des Martyrs, running steeply up to the Butte, with a few sinister lights twinkling between its blocks of ancient houses, she paused, unable to face the ascent. The Château des Zéphirs at this hour would be cold and empty. Old Benedetta went out every evening to a working-party that scraped lint and made bandages in a school-room in Rue Lepic ; and Deodato in the message he had contrived to send from the cantonments at Neuilly, whither his Battalion had been withdrawn after the failure of the attack, had held out no hope of returning home till after another night.

As she stood hesitating, drawing her cloak with its Red Cross badge on it round her shoulders, for the drizzle was beginning again, making a sticky mud which clung to the long skirts of the women who passed, she observed a number of people pouring through the iron gates of a deserted pleasure-garden known as the Elysée-Montmartre, now illuminated by a single oil-lamp slung from the decorative grille overhead. Beyond, a forlorn vista of begrimed statues and deserted arbours could be discerned, and traversing this by a gravel path, on the heels of the people who were entering, Ludovica, led by an impulse she did not try to define, found herself at the doors of the former dancing hall. Here a stout woman in a bonnet with a red cockade stopped her. "Your card, Citizenness?"

It *was* a club then! Ludovica knew she had been hoping so, and that she had come along the path in quest of some message to lighten her darkness. "I have no card," she confessed to the portress; "I came because I wished to hear."

"You desire to join the Club?" The woman eyed her keenly. "Do you know any of the Citizen Members who will vouch for you?"

Ludovica turned her eyes to the throng that was passing the doors, and suddenly saw, hopping along on crutches, a young Mobile whom she had tended for his severe wounds in the hospital. "M. Lebeyrie!" she called.

He limped towards her. "*You* here, Mme. Caprano! Is it possible you have joined us? Or have you come," he dropped his voice, "to meet your brother?" The young man knew the secret of M. Sambellini's identity.

"Is Piero a member, then?"

"A leading spirit! He should be here shortly."

"And he could admit me?"

"But that I can do! *Holà! la Bellotte!* This lady is a friend of Citizen Sambellini: I answer for her."

"*Le Manchot?*" said the portress with a respectful glint in her eyes, and at once admitted them.

(3)

Together they entered the gaudy ball-room, with its painted bouquets of flowers on the walls, and its shell-shaped alcove at the end, where in gayer days the orchestra used to play.

To-night the marble-topped tables and plush benches were filled with a very different throng from the giggling *midinettes* and flamboyant swains of Montmartre who had used to be the clientèle of the Elysée. In an atmosphere blue with pipe-smoke sat a gathering of working-men in blouses, most of them wearing also the képi and bandolier of the National Guard, accompanied by gaunt working-women of the region or debased prostitutes with enormous copper-coloured chignons and flowered hats perched on top of them. There was a sprinkling, too, of the black *redingotes* of the bourgeoisie, and a few survivors of the artist colony, ferociously garnished with such tokens of war as Moorish rifles, serpentine Chinese daggers, Tyrolese hats and eighteenth century jack-boots. No music came from the platform under the alcove ; its place was taken by a growl of talk that had a vibrant ground-bass ; and in place of the *limonades* and other light drinks sipped by the dancing demoiselles, the waiters were busily serving cognac and absinthe.

" But there is Citizen Sambellini, Madame ! " exclaimed Labeyrie as they sat down at an empty table, " over there beneath the platform talking to the President ! " He made vain signals with his crutch. "*Toqué*, le President ! But what does it matter if he is cracked ? He is a good patriot like the rest, and ready, like all of us, to hang the *capitulards* from the lamp-posts ! " He laughed with boyish innocence.

Ludovica discreetly used her glass to examine the faces of the assemblage. They seemed mostly a low-browed, under-nourished type of slum-dweller, showing all too plainly in bleared eye or shaking hand the ravages of the incessant siege-tipping. Yet there were distinctions to be drawn. In one place the honest obstinacy of some white-whiskered shop-keeper shone among the sallow, rat-like profiles ; in another a group of youthful idealists, with narrow foreheads and hollow cheeks, awoke her maternal instinct as they tapped the ends of execrable cigarettes on the tables, their glances burning with expectation. They had the candour of the youthful Mobile at her side ; at worst the restlessness she remembered in her brother when a boy. And presently she began to perceive that there was an aristocracy in the room. Alone or in taciturn twos or threes, with their aloofness respected by all, sat a number of elderly men, with faces that seemed to have been originally hacked from wood and then deeply dinted by life's warfare. Some in ragged clothes and slouched hats, others attired with a puritan

preciseness crowned by the stove-pipe of respectability, one or two crazily bedizened in feathers, forage-caps or frogged jackets, they had a common attitude, betraying the patience learned in prison-cells, and a common expression. Mostly decked with beards as rigid as their features, they all sat with eyes that glared into the vacancy of a fixed idea.

By degrees these staring eyes on every side of her began to turn into a nightmare to Ludovica. Terrifying enough in the heads of the fanatics of an ideology, they became hideously sinister in certain countenances displaying a sub-human distortion. Here a mouth and chin dwindled away as if a doll's features had been substituted in the lower half of the face. There a forehead seemed to have been shorn off by an axe, a crooked nose prolonged a squint to the lips, a profile was marred (this was a recurring symptom) by a lack of balance, as if the face had been cast in two parts and the sides not set accurately together. The misfits of life glowered alongside the thwarted pursuers of Utopia with an identical menace. From what holes and corners had this hidden world emerged into the smoky light of Paris's decaying social organism? And suddenly Ludovica perceived a woman with the face of an angel, her brown hair falling in cork-screw curls upon the back of her neck, sitting in a serene meditation, as if alone in the midst of the crowd, utterly incongruous in her tranquil loveliness with all that surrounded her. "Who is she?" Ludovica whispered to Lebeyrie. "The wife of Eudes," he replied, "that dapper little fellow with the pointed beard! . . . A great strategist who has never done a day's soldiering! . . . I thought the Eudes were still hiding in Brussels."

A rattle of applause and jingling of glasses interrupted him, hailing the appearance on the platform of a short procession, headed by the President of the Club, a terrified nonentity with a vandyke beard, and ended by Piero, who seated himself at the edge of the rostrum with an expression of sombre boredom. After some mumbled remarks the President tinkled a ridiculous little bell and shrilled, "Pray silence, Citizens and Citizenesses, for Citizen Beslay."

On to the platform stumped a hale old man, with a straight-forward eye and a long, kindly mouth half-hidden by his shaggy beard. His grey hair fell in a leonine mane round his temples. For a moment or two he stood smiling at the Club as if they were all children of his, some of whose names he was ashamed not at the

instant to remember. While doing this he pulled off a pair of woollen gloves, and folding them with care like a good bourgeois, put them in his overcoat pocket. Then, with a broadening of his affectionate smile, "*Eh bien, mes amis !*" he began.

"Say 'Citizens !' " cried a voice.

"Citizens, certainly ! But why not friends as well ? At least I hope there is no ill-will between us two !" He chuckled. "Well then, Citizens, I wish to give you a message to-night, to take away with you and ponder well." His voice became grave. "There is one hope that has brought us all here to-night, is there not—it is the Commune !"

"*Eh, oui, la Commune !*" A tumult of applause swept up—cheering, hand-clapping, stamping of ill-shod feet, thumping of fists and rattling of glasses on the table-tops. It was a spontaneous outbreak that lasted for quite two minutes, and sent a tremor through Ludovica. Yes, these people had an idea ; they had an enthusiasm and knew what they were ready to fight for—the Commune !

As the applause at length began to die away, a voice shouted, "*À bas Trochu !*" and there was another, angrier roar of assent, which in its turn was fed and revived when another member growled "*Mort aux capitulards !*"

Beslay raised his hand to still this threatening clamour. "The guilty persons will render account," he said ; "but do not let us think so much, my friends, of pulling down as of building up ! That is what we are united here to do. To set up the humble, the labourers, the sufferers ; to give them their just share, their due place in the order of a renovated society ! It is to that end I would give you a watchword, *La Paix et le Travail !* What you have now is war and starvation. What you ought to have is Peace and Work !"

"No peace with the Prussians !" shouted several resentful voices. "*À bas les capitulards !*"

Beslay waved his hand at them like an easy-going schoolmaster. "No peace with the Prussian while he threatens us, perhaps ! But let him go home . . . and he will go with our good wishes. Jacques Bonhomme has no quarrel with Hans Zimmermann ! It is the Emperors and the Kings who have made this war ; it will be the wives and mothers who will end it !"

"Not before the revenge ! . . . *La revanche ! la revanche !*"

"No, no!" pleaded Beslay. "Do not put it about that the Commune is a gospel of revenge, of hate, of the overthrow of society!"

"It needs overthrowing! *À bas les aristos!*"

"*À bas Guillaume!*"

"*À bas Bismarck!*"

"*À bas Trochu! Mort aux capitulards!*"

"Hush! hush! hush!" Beslay put his hands over his ears. "Think, I say, of what we will build up! Brotherhood, work in common, peace and unravaged fields! The rich shall not have a better case than the poor before the judges. The mother shall not fear the death of her infant from disease or malnutrition—nor when her son is grown up shall she dread to see his poor body torn by shot or shell. The sweetheart shall not lose her boy, nor the wife her husband through war," his voice deepened like a bell, "through ever-execrable war. The earth is generous with her fruits, my friends; the invention of the scientist and the engineer. . . . I am an engineer who speaks to you . . . will multiply those gifts, creating plenty for all. The night is dark now, but I can see through it to a bright and glorious future! We shall cease to deface the sacred image of the human family——"

"There is nothing sacred here!" complained a member. "*À bas les prêtres!*"

Beslay laughed. "You are very suspicious, my friend! I want no priest but Humanity itself, conscious of its rights and duties, its eyes set upon its splendid goal—the universal Republic, the Brotherhood of Mankind!"

The bluff, old face was transfigured as he cried these last words. The air of naïveté, the faint touch of fatuity vanished in the glow that shone from it, and Ludovica's eyes filled with tears. Tears that were like a caress, which washed away the heavy lump on her heart. She did not realise it, but these were the first words of peace, of kindness, of faith in the future of the world that she had heard almost since the siege began. Piero's bitterness, Deodato's stolid resignation tempered by artistic detachment had been unable to stay this aching spiritual hunger. She felt as if she had come into green fields after months spent in a black city slum. . . . And with this went the sub-conscious relief of finding that she had not made a fool of herself by taking the path into this club. Bread of the soul was being offered here to the starving; she was no longer conscious

of the glowering eyes on every side of her ; she saw only the face of Charles Beslay, powerful in its benignity as that of one of the Sistine Prophets !

She found she could not stop her weeping, and drew down her veil to cover her cheeks. This blurred her view of the next orator after Beslay, and she was too deep in her meditations to attend much to what he said. She only gathered from his harsh tone and the savagery of the assenting cries he elicited, that he was speaking in a very different vein. . . . But that did not seem to be her affair. . . .

She was surprised by a sudden touch on her shoulder, and looked up to see her husband regarding her with a pale, affectionate smile.

" You ! " she exclaimed. " You said you would not be back in Paris till to-morrow ! "

" I was more fortunate than I had hoped. The 261st have returned to Montmartre. I have just come from headquarters. "

" *Caro*, you should have gone home and rested ! "

" I could not rest, knowing you were here. "

" How did you know it ? Two hours ago I had not dreamed I should ever find myself in such a place. "

" Charpentier, my studio assistant, you know, saw you entering as he passed by in the street. He ran to tell me, feeling sure you would not be safe. I hurried here at once to find you. "

" But how did you get in ? "

Deodato smiled. " By the double talisman of a five-franc piece and Citizen Sambellini's name. I suppose you used the same charm ? "

" M. Labeyrie, here, also aided me. " Deodato bowed to the Mobile.

" I have done wrong, Deodato, I know, to give you this anxiety ! " whispered Ludovica.

" You have not done wrong, but it is so strange ! What did you come here to seek ? "

" Oh ! Deodato, some relief, some outlet for my mind ! Some words with a hope for the future ! "

" And you found them ? " he asked incredulously. " When I entered I could hear nothing but roars of '*À mort ! À mort !*' "

" You did not hear M. Beslay. But let us go. You need your supper and a rest ! "

She had risen from her chair and turned to leave when a noisy

demonstration all round her caused her to stop and look round again, lifting her lorgnette.

The cheering, mingled with a slight note of derision, a flavour of sex mockery, had greeted the appearance upon the platform of a female speaker. A black bonnet tilted to the back of the head revealed a horse-like face, with the towering forehead of the idealist, a bony, aquiline nose, a wide mouth with a thrust of obstinacy at its centre, and eyes like smouldering coals. A sombre cape was drawn round the narrow shoulders, giving a funereal air to the figure, which, to Deodato's eyes, seemed a fitting apparition to stand by the grave prepared for a moribund society. Nevertheless, there was a human, almost humorous, glint to the intelligent face of the creature; and when she began to speak in a rough, almost mannish voice, there were no more titters or lewd whistles in the hall, but only an impassioned attention.

"I speak to you, Citizens," said Louise Michel, "in the name of the women of France, those who suffer the most, and have on that account the most right to be heard. . . . Yes, it is we who suffer the worst; in love, you men have the pleasure, we the pain; the infant—it is to you no more than a doll, a toy to exhibit with pride" (cries of virtuous dissent) "but to us it is sleepless nights and wearing days . . . and the labour of women, it is never ended till you . . . you men . . . have sent the fruit of all our pains and toils and hopes to be trampled into a bloody mess to serve your ambitions, the ambitions of Emperors, Kings and dictators! Now I say to all such in the name of the women of the world that the hour of revolt is at hand! We who are the sufferers by war, we will make an end of war!"

"Where are *your* babies, Louise?" cried a rude voice.

"You don't die on the field; you don't freeze in the trenches—you women!" objected a National Guardsman.

Louise Michel turned on him, her eyes darting fire, her mouth seeming to curve to the ears in an ironical smile. "You mock at us, do you, because we are not trained to handle the chassépot? Let me tell you, comrade, we have far more cruel conflicts to wage within. And let me tell you this also! I have engaged myself to fight, wherever I am wanted, in the field, in the trenches, on the ramparts . . . some of you have seen me in my uniform, have you not?" There was a burst of half-mocking applause, which she disregarded, advancing to the edge of the platform, with her hands

on her hips and the ends of her black cape flapping behind her. "Yes," she cried, "I have engaged to fight in the trenches, and now I do something more . . . I swear to you that when the day comes, I shall be ready to die upon the barricades!" Her voice rose to a shriek on the last word, and seemed to send an electric shock through her audience.

There was a second's pause; then a voice cried, "*V'lan dans l'œil!*" and down came a thunder of applause, rivalling that which had greeted Beslay's mention of the Commune.

Louise Michel listening to it seemed to be transported as if in the arms of a lover, her long, pale face quivering, her mouth softened by a smile oddly inconsistent with the purport of her words.

Ludovica cast a glance at her brother on the platform. He was hugging his knee with his one hand, grinning like a schoolboy who sees the headmaster pelted, and he retained this expression as the assembly broke into the "*Marseillaise*," shaking the walls with their bellow, while glasses chinked together and fell with a broken tinkle, and at last some lunatic sent a shot from his rifle into one of the chandeliers.

"Come away!" urged Deodato, pulling at Ludovica's cloak. "For God's sake, darling, come away before it gets worse!"

"I am coming, I am coming!" answered Ludovica; but still she held back, watching Louise, who was stilling the tumult and remonstrances that had followed the shot with imperious gestures from a coarse, working-woman's hand that scarcely seemed as if it could belong to the owner of the aristocratic curves in the eloquent, ugly face. "I demand five hundred women for recruits *now!*" she screamed. "Women sworn to work . . . and to fight, if need be, till the Commune is established, and every child born into this world has at least the chance of health and happiness in a community of sisters and brothers!"

Amid a final burst of cheering, she picked up her dress and jumped off the platform. Before Deodato could restrain Ludovica, she had rushed over to meet her. Louise had stumbled in her long skirts as she landed on the boards, and caught hold of Ludovica's arm to steady herself.

"*Peste* on these skirts!" she snapped; "we women will never do anything till we get *culottes!* . . . You were listening to me, my dear, were you not? I could feel you! Who are you?"

"I am with you!" answered Ludovica hurriedly, her brown eyes

wide and shining. "To work for the new order . . . the Commune . . . call it what you will . . . but not to kill! There has been enough of killing!"

"Ah! my love," Louise stroked the arm she had caught hold of. "Do you think it would give me pleasure to kill anything—except superstitions and falsehoods. But these men . . . they are such babies! You must make everything a fight for them; otherwise they will never feel their pride stirred, and then they will do nothing. Stand with me, dear, to build up, not to destroy! I promise you the Commune will whiten all the fields of France with a new harvest of love. . . . What is your name? . . . No, not your husband's, I don't care about him . . . your own! . . . Ludovica? Well, will you come and talk to me, Ludovica, to-morrow, at my room, 22 bis, Rue Mouffetard? . . . I shall still be there to-morrow, I think. But the police of Trochu have found me out again; and next week I must be somewhere else. . . . What does it matter . . .?"

In the garden as Deodato and Ludovica came out they met Piero, who had also left before the end of the meeting, and was sardonically surprised at finding them. Ludovica sang the praises of Louise Michel. "What a woman, little brother! What a flame!"

"Call me Sambellini or Citizen, not your brother! As for Louise—what a windbag, I say! *She* put on uniform and risk her skin! We shall see if she does."

"I trust she will not," said Deodato.

"Piero, we do not want more fighting!"

"You two do not!" He glanced spitefully at them as they passed one of the rare lamps in the black street. "*Bons bourgeois*, the pair of you . . . capitulation is salvation—for your sort! Capitulation before the last bottle of Clos Vougeot and the last of your hoard of tinned tongues disappear."

Deodato did not think it worth while to observe that Piero since he entered Paris had practically lived on them, though sleeping in a variety of lodgings he would never name; and that he had never shrunk from taking his full share of their modest supplies, particularly the wine, the last vestiges of Count Orlando's cellar, salvaged before the siege began from Cythère.

"I shall denounce you one day!" concluded Piero, with a smile that was only half reassuring, "a revolutionary has no sisters . . . no brothers, in law or in religion, you know!" He turned off without

explanation at one of the side-streets winding round the Butte, and left them to finish the climb alone, arm-in-arm.

"At least," remarked Deodato, "there is truth in what he says about capitulation being near."

He felt Ludovica's arm tremble in his, as she asked, "How can that be?"

"I had it from the General's aide-de-camp at headquarters. Clément Thomas told him, it seems, that now the attempt to break out by Buzenval has failed—if it was ever meant to succeed—Trochu will yield to necessity."

"But, Deodato," said Ludovica in a strained voice, "General Trochu has sworn that while he is Governor of Paris there shall be no capitulation!"

"I understand," said Deodato dryly, "that he will resign his functions as Military Governor, and sign the capitulation merely as Head of the Government of National Defence."

"I cannot blame him for being forsworn," said Ludovica in a trembling tone. The next moment she had flung herself on Deodato's shoulder in a tempest of sobs. "I cannot endure it," she moaned, "I cannot endure it! The things I have seen. This poor, poor people! Enduring all, daring all; hunger and cold and bombardment, wounds and death; their little livelihoods ruined by the war—and they have never complained; their dear ones snatched from them by bullet or disease . . . oh! the funerals of babies I have counted in the streets these last weeks, because there was no milk for them, no warmth! All this they bore, the people of Paris, for the sake of their country, while their chiefs *never* believed they could win! They have played with lives to save their faces . . . and now they sit down coolly to hand over the city. It is too much, too much!"

"But what could they do, dearest?" The professional soldier spoke in Deodato. "When you are beaten, it is no shame to recognise it. You don't want more of these poor fellows led to slaughter for nothing—more horrors like Champigny and Buzenval?"

"Then," she declared passionately, "something must be done for the people! Reparation!"

"How, my dearest?"

"The Commune! We must found the Commune!"

He frowned perplexedly. "What does it mean, this Commune

everyone chatters of? It is only a Municipal Council, is it not? How can it do more than the National Government?"

"Oh! no! no! it is more than that, much more! I understand it now! It is the Commune of Mankind, nothing less, the Council of Humanity! Listen, *Deodato mio*! There is nothing else, truly there is nothing else that can save us! Nationality, I believed in it once, but it is not enough. The nation must be transcended in the human brotherhood, and that, that alone is the Commune, *sposo mio*!"

He looked at her in amazement, and dismay. Whence had this new flame of enthusiasm come to seize on her and consume . . . who could tell how much—her happiness and his own, it was probable, among greater things? He knew what a force she was. History would never tell how much the creation of Italy had been due to her fire of devotion and concealed sacrifice. To what ambiguous masters now was she offering that same power of stimulation, that thirst for self-offering which marked her as the true kinswoman to the Beata of the sixteenth century? But he realised that it would be useless to try to check her. Some cause to serve she must have or her soul would wither. Personal love had not been enough for her; she had given all she could of that to him—and she wanted something more; he ought to have foreseen it. Children, perhaps? But she who had been barren in her loveless marriage with Smolensk, showed yet no sign of fruitfulness with him. . . . On the slimy stones of the Rue des Martyrs, glistening with the recent rain, there fell and broke in pieces his own humble dream that they might now consider their debt to France and Paris paid, and spend the rest of their days in the golden peace of Italy. Ludovica had discovered that she had something more to do; and he, because she was more to him than all the world and his art too, was ready, after this one regretful sigh, to follow her and try again to serve her.

(4)

After their frugal siege-supper had been dispatched, they were sitting in the little salon of the Château des Zéphirs to rest, when a knock came on the front-door. Ludovica had sent Benedetta to bed immediately on her return, to rest her wearied old limbs, and Deodato went to answer. In a minute he brought back into the drawing-room Citizen Sambellini and two strangers.

"Allow me to make the presentations," said Piero, before he could speak. "This is Citizen Assi, of the Central Committee of the Federation of National Guards. You should welcome Citizen Assi, my sister. He is of our nation and fought for Garibaldi in Sicily. This," Piero turned to the second of his friends, "is Citizen Ferré, President of the Committee of Vigilance for the Arrondissement of Montmartre; it will be useful for you and your husband one day," he added with that disquieting, oblique glance of his, "to be well acquainted with the Citizen Ferré."

Except that they both wore the bush of heavy beard that had now replaced the trimmed imperial tuft as the mode of Paris, the two visitors were as unlike as could be. Assi, in his smart National Guardsman's uniform, with gold braid gleaming at the cuffs, looked the ideal of revolutionary romanticism. Slim, olive-skinned, melancholy; with slumbrous eyes, and full sensuous lips protruding from his beard, he exuded fascination for women. His voice, when presently he spoke, had a velvet quality that made Deodato wonder why he had never trained for an operatic baritone. His companion was so short as to appear almost a dwarf; his enormous head was draped in black hair and black beard, which, with the black ribbon drooping from his pince-nez, gave a doleful elongation to his impassive face, white as a clown's mask. Behind the glasses the eyes were inky lakes, staring dully at some absent object of concentration. He wore a frock-coat so long in the skirts that it seemed to touch his ankles, his starched cuffs were spotless, the silk hat he carried of an unruffled sheen. His voice, as he acknowledged his presentation, was thin and indifferent.

For Assi, Ludovica found a special warmth of welcome. "You and I, Citizen," she told him, "are not only compatriots; we have been soldiers in the same cause, that of united Italy."

"Yes," assented Assi complacently. "I fought in Italy for freedom. It is freedom that matters, Citizeness Caprano, not the country you bring it to. And I have fought for the freedom of the worker in the great strike of last year at Creusot's arms-factory. Perhaps," he added pompously, "you have heard about that, Citizeness? And now I represent no single country or class, but the Internationale."

Deodato, though bored by this visit, invited the unbidden guests to be seated, and went in quest of cigars and a bottle from the cellar that had roused Piero's virtuous indignation an hour or two before.

He noted with sardonic amusement that his brother-in-law made no objection as he poured it out. Nor did Citizen Assi, who allowed his glass to be thrice refilled, and seemed to find the generous grape-juice a liberator of his eloquence. He had soon dropped into Italian, and standing on the hearthrug was haranguing the little party as though they were a committee or a club. Ferré smoked in silence.

"The Commune!" declared Assi in his rich, caressing tones, "but it is the primary cell of human association! Nations breed wars, empires build tyrannies; but the city-state is the hearth of liberty and peace; it threatens none, and to each citizen it gives a direct voice in the affairs of the community. The city-state is the gift of Italy to the world. It is we who have illustrated its working and demonstrated its capacities.

"Athens and Geneva," suggested Deodato, "might serve as exemplars too?"

Assi swept these instances away with his cigar. "The true conception of the Commune," he insisted, "is Italian, purely Italian. It comes from Florence, Milan, Pisa, cities of glorious traditions!"

"And glorious tyrannies," added Deodato with a satyr-like malice.

"And glorious tyrannicides!" interjected Piero in a knife-edged voice.

"Evidently!" assented Citizen Ferré, startling everybody as if one of the statuettes adorning the salon had spoken.

Assi accepted another glass of wine, and pursued his lecture. "In our own day," he continued, "Mazzini and the Triumvirs set up the Commune in Rome; Daniele Manin in Venice. Their work has been suppressed by Kings and Emperors; but to-day the wings of those birds of prey are broken. Italy once again offers salvation to the world, stands ready with the political truth that will cure its ills—the Commune for which the next fight must be fought!" He dropped the red-hot stub of his cigar on to Deodato's Persian rug, and ground it in with a spurred heel.

Ludovica clasped her hands together and sat gazing at him. "I knew it!" she murmured. "The Commune is Italian! I felt it was in my blood, part of my traditions! . . . Now I remember, Citizen Assi, my first teacher the Abate Visconti, taught me something of the kind about our City Republics . . . but at the time I could receive only the gospel of national unity."

Citizen Assi frowned. "I cannot believe anything of value was ever learned from a priest," he said. "The notion is absurd!"

"Evidently!" came the high voice of Ferré again.

Deodato in his arm-chair, trying to suppress the yawns of his three days' campaigning outside the walls, reflected tenderly on Ludovica's inconsistencies. The nationalism that she had repudiated coming up the hill to the house, was now sending out fresh shoots from the never-exhausted soil of her spirit. . . . But how beautiful she was in these moments of ecstasy! And he wondered with his innate scepticism whether any cause would not be made divine by such an advocate. Surely it was the heroism that mattered, not the flag!

Assi, meanwhile, was graciously accepting her conversion. "One comes to the truth by degrees," he said, nodding his head. "You have advanced gradually, Citizeness, into the light."

"These gradual advances!" sneered Piero. "While you bourgeois . . . for you are a bourgeois, too, Assi, in reality, with your lessons from Quinet . . . while you weave and spin Utopias, the people go on suffering, starving, dying. . . . Poor devils! . . . They need a bomb, not a book, to set them free. The Commune means, and means first of all, Destruction! Not only the façade of the old tyrannies must be scraped off; the whole building must be blown away! Yes, *sorellina*, I repeat, however you may roll your great eyes at me, we must get salvation by destruction. Haussmann cleared away the foul old rookeries of this Paris with the pick-axe; it was too slow; we shall use explosive! We must annihilate before we think of rebuilding!"

Assi took the second excellent cigar Deodato had just handed to him from his lips, and gazed vaguely round the salon, with its silk curtains, pieces of Sèvres and the small art-treasures accumulated during its owner's life-time. "*Sicuro!*" he murmured. "We shall destroy. *Sicuro!*"

"Evidently!" squeaked Citizen Ferré from his corner.

That night Ludovica awoke in Deodato's arms with a cry.

"What is the matter, *carissima*?" he murmured.

"They are all looking at *me*!" she wailed. "I cannot bear those glowering eyes!"

CHAPTER THREE

THE CANNON

(1)

IT was Deodato's turn to have uneasy dreams in the dawn of a March day nearly two months later. Through them went the *clack, clack* of feet marching in stiff, high boots; columns, oceans of Prussian soldiers pouring through an Arc de Triomphe magnified by nightmare till it touched the sky. An Arc de Triomphe that opened on the street of Saint-Privat . . . and he did not want to see the dead of Saint-Privat again. . . . He did not want to see the German with his jaw shot away and the frantic blue eyes gleaming over the ruin. . . . It was all right for the Prussians to be marching through Paris . . . that had been in the terms that followed the capitulation. . . .

Clack, clack; tramp, tramp. . . . How absurd of M. Adolphe Thiers to be leading them, riding on a starved horse in his tightly buttoned frock-coat and gold spectacles! . . . Nobody had said he was going to lead the Prussian defile through the Champs-Élysées . . . he had signed the peace terms, but why was he leading their army . . . an army of Lutheran clergymen with black legs swinging like pendulums? . . . Ah! here came the Prussian Guard! . . . All of them skulls under spiked helmets! . . . They were going to make him see the dead of Saint-Privat, after all! It was illegal; the Prussians had only the right to march down the Champs-Élysées, and he would not go back with them!

He struggled under a weight that numbed his limbs . . . and woke staring at the ceiling of his bedroom in the Château des Zéphirs, while the light struggled with a bluish tinge through the slats of the shutters. *Tramp, tramp; tramp, tramp*, he could still hear it softly, and with a sudden alarm he sat up and looked for Ludovica.

It was all right. He could make out her head beside him; her hair spread over the pillow. He stooped to peer at her, and heard

her breath come peacefully; saw her small mouth quivering. It was all right! . . .

What the devil? That tramping was going on still? It was *not* part of his dream then? No! It was outside . . . under the window . . . slowing down now with the noise of a wave dragging over shingle, and, yes, he heard low-voiced commands . . . in French!

Soldiers! Soldiers on Montmartre at this hour! He struck a match to see his watch. Five o'clock! What were troops doing on the Butte at five o'clock? What troops could they be? He leapt out of bed and threw back a shutter.

The deep lane running up beside the house to the crest of the Butte was filled with halted infantrymen. Infantrymen in red trousers and red képis! Not National Guards then, but Regulars of the Line! Deodato was more bewildered than ever. Why, in God's name, were the Government sending regular troops to Montmartre on this morning of March 18th?

The tramping began again. It was coming now from the Rue du Passage Cottin, another narrow, almost precipitous, lane whereby the Butte could be escalated from its Eastern corner, under the tawdry, striped Tour Solférino, just visible now against the cold steel sky. Every approach, then, was being occupied? Were they surrounding Montmartre with a whole Division?

Deodato craned out of the window; but could see no further towards the summit of the Butte than the end of the lane where it joined the Rue Cottin by the wall of the pleasure-gardens. He perceived, however, creeping along the cover of the wall under the Tower, a number of figures carrying carbines, and wearing on their breasts the loops and tassels of the Gendarmerie. . . . In a flash the purport of the manœuvre came to Deodato. Police and troops were here to take away the cannon! . . .

On the barren waste surrounded by low walls that then crowned the summit of Montmartre there had stood ranged under the eye of the National Guard since the end of February more than a hundred pieces of artillery. These guns, paid for by national subscription during the siege and allotted to battalions of the National Guard, had been dragged up to the top of the hill from their parking-places in the western squares by the indignant arms of the people, to save them from being surrendered to the Prussians under the terms of the capitulation of Paris.

Deodato at the time had smiled at this pathetic gesture. He understood the revolt of the Parisians against the humiliating terms of peace signed at Versailles on February 26th by the new Government of France elected by the new National Assembly at Bordeaux. They had had to see the Regulars of the Army of Paris disarmed, all but a Division, and their artillery handed over; they had had to hear the Prussian drums beating for the victory-parade under the Arc de Triomphe; but since it had been stipulated that the National Guard might retain their rifles, they were determined to keep their cannon too.

From Versailles, whither he had now moved the Assembly, the new Chief of the Executive Power of France, M. Thiers, had watched the effervescence of the capital with a frown. The little old man with the cockatoo crest and the thin, contemptuous lips had come back at last to save France according to his own ideas, not those of the mob. He meant to have back those cannon . . . but Deodato had supposed that he would gain his ends by negotiation. To Italian realism the situation was absurd. France needed peace; the National Guard of Paris must see that it could not withstand the will of France! Deodato had never dreamed, though, that Thiers would send an armed force up to the Butte to take away the guns. That was a desperately risky thing to attempt. Montmartre, like all the popular quarters of the city, was simmering with revolt. If violence was used against Montmartre, Montmartre would fight! Who could tell what the end of that would be? Civil war under the eyes of the Prussian Army, still keeping watch on Paris from the Forts which it now occupied outside!

As though to give the answer to his perplexities, a shot rang out from the Butte, to be followed by the thud of Ludovica's bare feet upon the polished boards of the floor as she leapt from the bed in terror. "What is it, Deodato? What has happened?" she cried. Drowning his reply came a scattered volley from the same direction and a noise of shouting. At the same instant the troops waiting under the window moved forward with a crunch of feet.

Ludovica stared out aghast. "What are these soldiers?" she stammered. "What have they come for?"

"To seize the guns, I fear!" replied her husband. "There will be trouble!"

Ludovica dashed to the wardrobe for clothes, and as she did so the bell of the front-door facing the Butte across the road skirting

its northern edge pealed in a jangling discordance. Deodato fled downstairs to open it, his wife following, hurriedly dressed. They saw on the threshold a gasping figure in the blue pantaloons and tunic of the National Guard, wild hair streaming over its shoulders.

"Louise!" cried Ludovica.

Louise Michel's eyes blazed, her teeth showed through her long, curled-back lips. "Come! come!" she cried. "At once! Treason! Treachery! They are taking our cannon . . . they have shot the sentries . . . they are massacring the wounded!" She seized Ludovica's wrist in a claw-like grip. "Run, *chérie*, run to the Rue des Rosiers . . . Find Ferré . . . rouse the Committee of Vigilance! I go to alarm the quarter of Clignancourt, to gather the Guards. . . . Don't wait, *chérie*, run, I implore you!"

Deodato caught his wife round the waist. "Stay, Ludovica, I command you! . . . It's not our business!"

Louise screeched at him like a wild-cat. "Not your business, M. l'Adjudant-Major? . . . when butchery may begin at any minute! The people are pressing round the soldiers up there, women with children in their arms, protesting, expostulating! . . . The officers of the *Lignards* are getting impatient . . . growing frightened. How long before they order their men to fire . . . fire on the women? You're an officer, Captain Caprano; do your duty . . . and let Ludovica do hers! . . . Listen! There goes the tocsin from Saint-Pierre! You'll be too late!"

As the bell of the church began to clang out, the three of them ran to the garden-gate and tried to look across the walled enclosures and old farm buildings that hid the Butte from them on the further side of the road. They could see nothing; but heard a mounting uproar behind the crest. "I must go, Deodato!" said Ludovica; "it is to save life!" and twisting out of his hold she ran out of the gate to the right.

"Put on your uniform," Louise shouted to Deodato, as she loped off in the opposite direction, "try and parley with them till the guards arrive!"

(2)

Deodato accepted this as his duty, and in a few minutes, doing up his tunic as he ran, he arrived upon the bald crown of the Butte. The soldiers stood drawn up surrounding the cannon, while from

every road and lane and stairway leading to the crest, from Rue Lepic, from the Place du Tertre, from the Rue Saint-Eleuthère, from Rue Muller, the populace of Montmartre discharged itself upon the summit in jets and swirls, adding every moment to the wave that beat clamorous round the blue-and-red ranks. The bell of Saint-Pierre continued its clangour.

Deodato observed that, as Louise had said, the women took the lead. They argued with the soldiers, mocked, coaxed and threatened. Some held out their infants towards the bayonets. "Spit these on your steel then! . . . It's no worse than firing on their mothers. . . . Have they sent you to massacre us? . . . Since when have we become Prussians?"

In the centre of the hollow square formed by the Line Deodato saw a General on his horse. Conspicuous by the gold oak-leaves on his képi, he seemed the only mounted officer present. He had the hard face of a routinier behind a sparse goat-beard, and kept turning his head anxiously from side to side. Every minute that passed, the crowd encircling his brigade grew denser, spreading now from one rim of the Butte to the other, and still increasing.

"Who is he?" demanded Deodato of a bloused workman at his side.

"*Un nommé Lecomte.* Sent by Thiers to steal our cannon! The whole of Montmartre is crawling with *Lignards* and *flics*! Of course they sent the Gendarmes in front to do the dirty work. Shot our sentries from the cover of a wall, and seized the guns before the alarm could be sounded!"

"Well," said Deodato desperately, "they have the cannon. So much the worse! Why don't they take them away?"

The man sniggered. "The gun-teams haven't arrived—a trifling oversight! They have to wait for them . . . and meanwhile our people are gathering!"

They were indeed! All round the hill there floated up the throbbing of drums from the streets below. Near where Deodato stood the front of the *Lignards* had already lost its definiteness of outline. In places something like a goodnatured football scrimmage was going on; the women and children pushing laughingly against the ranks, the soldiers giving way, and then gently trying to reform. The Sergeants were swearing, but their men seemed not to heed. Then there came bursting through the crowd amid cheers a fat and greasy cantinière of the National Guard, followed by two girls,

bearing cans of steaming coffee and a sheaf of long French rolls. "It's for *them*," explained the jolly, trousered lady; "they're faint with hunger, poor lads! Figure it! Marched all the way from the Louvre and the Champs-Élysées without a drop in their stomachs! *Hold*, boys!" She had halted with her attendants by a low wall overlooking the vague grey wraith of Paris under the austere sky, and used its ledge to spread her wares. "Come to breakfast!" she shouted. "No charge, this morning!"

There was a ripple among the *Lignards*; then a whole squad broke loose, falling to the fragrant lure of the coffee, and ran to feed. Sergeants and Corporals cursed and pulled them back by the belt; but they scowled and even struck at the *gradés*.

On every hand now discipline was dissolving. Deodato realised that these troops, the debris of Sedan and Champigny, had not the stiffening necessary to make them fire on civilians of their own people. In several places girls had twined their arms round their necks and wheedled their rifles away from them; one merry wench had snatched a Line képi and perched it on her own red curls . . . The turbulent minutes passed, and no gun-teams yet!

Suddenly a beat of drums sounded behind Deodato's back, and fresh bayonets appeared over the heads of the mob. What was it? . . . More *Lignards* come to slaughter the people? . . . No! The glad news ran through the throng. It was the National Guard from Clignancourt, Batignolles, and La Chapelle, come to succour their comrades of Montmartre. The crowd parted to let them come through, and Deodato saw Louise Michel, in the midst of a group of drummers, waving her rifle as she advanced at the head of a battalion with the step of a prophetess in ecstasy.

The new mass of bayonets halted, and deployed in a ragged, bristling line in face of the red pantaloons. The next moment there was a wild scramble out of the line of fire, and Deodato found himself alone in the space between the two fronts. He dashed to Louise's side and plucked at her sleeve.

"My wife?" he demanded.

She turned with the human glint on her face. "Don't worry! Ludovica will be safe. They told me down there she had started with a deputation of the women of Montmartre to the Central Committee of the National Guard, Rue Basfroi. They will urge the Committee to assume the government of Paris. It is high time!"

Deodato gaped at her as if she were mad. The Committee of the National Guard! He thought he had never heard such a *saugrenue* idea! But his wonder was scattered by an abrupt hubbub mingled with shrieks from the crowd, which began to run again in all directions. Turning, he saw General Lecomte's leathery face towering over the ranks nearby, and the soldiers going in a slovenly, reluctant way through the motions of loading their rifles and bringing them to the "ready." Many, however, he noticed, refused to obey, and brought their butts down with a crash on the ground. Lecomte's sabre gleamed dully in the sad light above his head, and his thin voice was heard: *En joue!*

Before he could give the word to fire, Louise Michel screeched over all other sounds, "Soldiers! Don't shoot your brothers! *Crosse en l'air!* Hands up!" There was a mighty roar, and a forest of rifle-butts rose from the ranks of the Line. The National Guards rushed forward, gripping hands, giving embraces, slapping backs; the women began to dance and shower kisses, and General Lecomte's force was merged in the revolutionary mob. . . .

What next? thought Deodato, and as he tried to keep his feet he saw the General lurch sideways and disappear, dragged from his saddle by a score of angry hands. "Don't kill him!" he cried, and was reassured by an elderly National Guardsman apparently unattached to any formation. "Our fellows will look after him all right, *mon Capitaine*," he said. "They're only taking him to the Committee for judgment. *Dame!* He *did* order his men to fire on the people, you know!"

Deodato stood perplexed. As an officer he felt he had some responsibility, but did not know what. "Where are they taking the General to?" he demanded irresolutely.

"To the Château Rouge!" screamed a street-boy in rags, with a képi on his head and a long sabre bound round him, which caught in his legs. "They'll give him his packet! *Mort aux capitulards!*" He ran on yelling savagely.

"The boys are the worst!" said the elderly Guardsman.

The next moment they were enveloped by a howling mass of people threatening with fists, sticks and stones a knot of Gendarmes in their midst. Hatless and bleeding these policemen sought to defend themselves with blows and jabs of their carbine-butts. Their assailants were of a different stamp from the respectable working-folk who had formed the bulk of the crowd that had disarmed

Lecomte's soldiers. They had evidently oozed from the slummier corners of Montmartre or been spirited up from the rookeries of Clignancourt below. The degraded, alcohol-flushed faces of the men, the broken teeth and wisps of untidy hair disfiguring the female Furies told the tale—as did the scent of their breath.

Deodato pushed through them to the aid of the Gendarmes. "Don't shoot, brigadier!" he shouted in warning. "Don't shoot!" The brigadier, beside himself, mistook the purport of his gestures. "*Empoignez-moi ce drôle-là!*" he roared, and two of his men caught the would-be rescuer roughly by the arms.

Deodato's Italian fury blazed out. After all, he was an officer, and he had exposed himself to help these fellows! He struggled and struck out at the policemen. A carbine fell with a crack on his shoulder and a searing pain shot down his arm. *Sacré nom!* . . . He was disabled again, in the old place! He turned sick, and saw the melancholy sky, the tall white buildings below the Butte with their black-lettered advertisements, and the factory chimneys, shoot up round him like fireworks. Then he fell into a blackness, pierced by a rain of blows upon his ribs and legs . . . and came round to find himself supported on the ground by the same good-natured Guardsman who had spoken to him before the conflict began.

"Are you back again, *mon Capitaine?*" he asked. "Just like the *flics!* They never know friend from foe. They've taken *them* now to the post at the Château Rouge! You had some kicks too from the crowd when you went down. I thought they would trample you flat!"

Deodato groaned, and the other saw he was badly hurt. "You need a doctor!" he exclaimed looking round.

"Who needs a doctor?" asked a sharp voice, and Deodato looked up to see a youngish man with a bald, Bismarckian forehead, a drooping moustache and high, Tartar cheek-bones, looking down at him. A red scarf was draped over his shoulder.

"Never mind me, *M. le Maire!*" said Deodato feebly. "Run to the Château Rouge . . . save the prisoners, if you can!"

"Bring him to the Mairie to wait for me!" snapped Dr. Clemencau, and was gone.

The Guardsman beckoned to another onlooker who had like himself been keeping prudently out of the clashes of mob and soldiery, and together they lifted Deodato to his feet, and despite his weak

protests and requests to be helped back to his own house nearby, began to lead him down the Rue Saint-Eleuthère to take him to the Mairie.

Bruised and shattered he had not strength to resist; but he prevailed on them to change their course and take him to his own doctor who lived on the Place Pigalle, and might be able to attend to him at once.

The gaunt Place Pigalle was covered with another mob, and there had evidently been a conflict here. Bits of equipment were strewn over the square; there were ugly red smears on the paving-stones; and round the body of a grey horse, which lay with a tangle of military saddlery beside it, a swarm of ghouls had gathered, hacking it to pieces and carrying away raw, dripping joints for food.

While Deodato's helpers searched for the number of Doctor Tencin's house, a disorderly band of National Guards and bawling riff-raff crossed their path, dragging along a prisoner, a stout old man with a grey beard, dressed in a frock-coat and with a battered silk hat still clinging to his head. Deodato's escort flattened him against a wall and stood in front of him to protect him.

"Who's that? Who's that?" enquired the Guardsman eagerly of one of the inevitable gamins dancing along by the side of the escort.

"Clément!" yelled the child. "General Clément Thomas in a *redingote*! Came out to see the sights, it appears! But they smelt him out! He's off now to the Château Rouge with the others." He ran after the General's captors screaming, "*Au mur! Au mur!* Put him up against the wall!"

Deodato muttered protests. "An old man! Retired since the siege! What has he done?"

"What has he done, Citizen, what has he done?" shrieked a harridan in a tattered red skirt, sending a fiery blast of cheap spirits into his face as she opened her mouth. "He said the people needed bleeding, the good Clément! Now we'll bleed the pig! *A la saignée! A la saignée!*"

Deodato sank back against the wall, with a look of collapse. "What! courage! *mon Capitaine!*" cried the genial Guardsman. "No one will harm Thomas . . . nor Lecomte either! They are taking them to the Committee for their own safety . . . Just a step or two now. I see Dr. Tencin's house!"

(3)

While Montmartre thus boiled and raged, Ludovica waited with the rest of the deputation of women in the school-building in the Rue Basfroi behind the Place de la Bastille, where sat the General Committee of the Federation of National Guards.

The cold sun of the advancing day shot through the windows of the long class-room humming with deputations, visitors, messengers and *estafettes* from various National Guard battalions, who sought vainly to penetrate through the folding-doors behind which the Committee was in session. Above their agitated heads hung ironically peaceful pictures of farmyards, railways, workshops, and other educational subjects, together with a large map of France; while a blackboard in a corner exhibited a simple sum in addition.

Ludovica and her companions—small shopkeepers' wives, the proprietress of an apple-barrow and one or two working-women in shawls and sabots—quickly realised that they must wait a long while before they would have a chance of delivering their message to the overworked Committee. And indeed to Ludovica it seemed that amid the tremendous events which were taking place, rumours of which came pouring into the crowded ante-room hour by hour, there was little value in the platonic protestations of loyalty she was authorised to make to the Committee in the name of her sisters of Montmartre. From time to time the sliding-doors of the Committee Room would open a foot or two while the Guards standing as sentries admitted some privileged person or group, and a glimpse would be had of the new rulers of Paris, sitting in their gold-braided uniforms round a horse-shoe table in a cloud of cigar-smoke. Ludovica recognised the black-bearded Assi, magnificently statuesque in the presidential chair, and one or two other members of the Internationale whom her brother had made known to her. Then the doors closed again inexorably.

It was known now that all the popular battalions of the National Guard were under arms; since the news of the attempted coup on Montmartre all Paris had rocked to the alarm-bells, throbbed with warning drums. As for the bourgeois battalions of the Champs-Élysées, the Ternes and the Faubourg Saint-Germain—who cared about them? They might stand out if they desired—they would certainly never assemble to fight for Thiers and the Government; fat stomachs never fought! Meanwhile the Revolution was organising

itself. In every quarter a representative of the Federation, whether commissioned or not, had turned up to take command; everywhere the barricades were rising in the streets, almost as though the martyrs of 1848 and 1851 were pushing the paving-stones up from below and rising to renew their fight for liberty. The whole centre of Paris would presently be a fortified camp of the People, protected by the high, outlying bastions of Montmartre, the Buttes Chaumont and Père-Lachaise. Let the Government come and storm those, if it dared! . . . But it knew better! Thiers, lurking in the Foreign Office buildings just across the river, whither he had come to watch his great stroke, must know it by now! . . . He knew that his paltry army, left him by mercy of the Prussians, would never fire on the people!

At midday waiters carried trays into the Committee Room. The delegates were lunching there! They were sitting *en permanence*! It was a real *Quatre-Vingt-Treize*—how the ante-room buzzed with enthusiasm! The shades of Danton, Carnot, Robespierre and Saint-Just brooded over the whitewashed schoolhouse in the mocking brightness of the March sunshine. The women from Montmartre sat patiently on benches, or if they could find no seats leaned with their backs against the wall, demanding neither food nor drink, waiting till it should please their new masters to give them ear.

At about four o'clock arrived Charles Beslay, radiant as the afternoon, and warmly clasped Ludovica's hand. "*C'est fait!* It's done, Citizeness!" he exulted.

"What is done?" she asked, smiling responsively to his joy.

"The Revolution, *parbleu!* Paris is ours! At every point where Thiers planned an attack the troops fraternised with the people! To-morrow it is the Commune! The next day . . . who knows? . . . Universal Peace secured for the ages!"

"But the Government, M. Beslay?"

"Say Citizen, dear Citizeness!" He embraced her with a pure fervour, his Michael-Angelesque beard scraping her cheeks. "The Government is gone!"

"Gone!" There was a surge of listeners from all sides of the room. "Gone! . . . It's not possible!"

"Yes, Citizens!" Beslay beamed round on them. "The Government . . . the so-called National Government . . . has fled! Thiers is racing back to Versailles. I who speak to you saw his carriage galloping with its escort along the Quays on the Left Bank

towards the Porte de Saint-Cloud. . . . What was left of his Army had already fallen back across the river, and is evacuating Paris too! Think of it, my friends! A Revolution accomplished in half a day, and without spilling a drop of blood . . . not one drop!"

There was a ripple in the throng surrounding Beslay, and with an exclamation of delight Ludovica greeted her brother, who had pushed his way roughly to the front with his single hand. He disregarded her welcome. "Citizen Beslay," he said, "you are wanted at the Committee of your Arrondissement. They are all in confusion there . . . they get no orders from the Central Committee here, and," he dropped his voice, "if someone does not rally them they will dissolve. . . . Yet it is a vital point, the Luxembourg!"

"Certainly, certainly Citizen Sambellini, I will go and advise them!" said Beslay a trifle pompously. "I came here from the Luxembourg for directions and information . . . but the Committee, it appears, is too much occupied."

"Occupied with what?" asked Piero. "This is no time for talk, but for action! Thiers has flitted—so much the better! Now the Ministries, the Hôtel de Ville, the Louvre and all the barracks should be attacked and occupied without delay!"

"*Doucement, doucement!*" laughed Beslay. "No need of violence, Citizen!"

"But I say there is need of violence! Thiers's officers are trailing their tired battalions at this hour through the Champs-Élysées, along the boulevards of the Left Bank, in retreat from Paris. They should be attacked from every side-street, fired upon from every window and roof; at each corner there should be a barricade to stop them. . . . They are utterly demoralised . . . they could be cut to pieces!"

"*Ah! les pauvres bougres!* Citizen, they only ask to be allowed to fraternise with the people! I would not shed the blood of these French lads simply because they wear red pantaloons instead of blue! It would be a senseless act!"

Piero regarded him a moment with a frozen smile. Then he gave a shrug. "So," he said, "Revolutions are unmade! . . . Adieu, Citizen Beslay! I perceive there is neither a Marat nor a Robespierre in Paris to-day!" He shouldered his way through the bystanders, and rapped his wooden hand on the folding-doors of the Committee Room with the peremptoriness of a master.

A murmur went round the ante-room. "*C'est le Manchot!* . . .

Oui, c'est le Manchot ! No nonsense with him ! *Il est très fort, le Manchot ! . . .* We want more of his sort !” The doors slid back wide, and Piero strode into the session of the Committee. “You see,” chattered the onlookers, as the doors slammed behind him to check the following surge, “there’s one who arrives where he wants to go !”

The day was drawing to an end before the women’s deputation was at last introduced into the sacred arcanum of the Committee, and in the stuffy room, reeking of cigar-smoke, food, beer and wine, Ludovica was able to read the declaration that had been drawn up for them by the Committee of Vigilance of Montmartre.

It was the usual fizzing revolutionary rhetoric ; but as she read it in her deep, grave voice, seeming to give an almost naïve assent to its platitudes as though they were truths she was taking fresh into her own soul, a silence settled upon the untidy, malodorous schoolroom. The sun, as it died away, sent a last gleam to irradiate her locks, uncovered as she had rushed out of the house in the morning, and gave her while she stood rigidly intent upon her reading, the air of a gilded monument, an unwinged Victory. The women she had brought with her gazed at her with something like awe ; the more emotional members of the Committee sobbed ; Assi sat staring at her, his moist, red lips protruding through his beard, his lids half-closed, palpably more seduced by the woman than by the prophetess. By the time her reading ended—with the cry of *Vive la Commune !*—she had stirred such an enthusiasm that there was a scene of frantic feeling, men exchanging embraces, men and women kisses. Only two persons round the curving table with its piled *képis*, disordered papers, ink-stained quills, crumbs and wet circles left by glasses, seemed to remain unmoved. One was Citizen Sambellini, sitting with his chair tilted back and a contemptuous, slightly jealous smile on his lips ; the other was President Assi, who, with his head on his hand, still studied Ludovica with eyes that did not trouble now to hide their desire. She herself looked bewildered about the room, while she surrendered her hands to the ardour of the younger members of the Committee, and did not appear to understand the exaltation of which she had been the cause. . . .

A few minutes later the famished deputation was on its way back home in the twilight through a city that palpitated with excite-

ment, but displayed no signs of ferocity. In the richer quarters "business as usual" seemed the slightly defiant note; theatres and cafés blazed and shops were still open. In the poorer streets the people stood about on the pavements, leaned from windows calling through the dusk, and gathered to applaud the patrols of the National Guard as they passed with thudding drums.

Ludovica would have been thankful if she could have found some conveyance to rest her wearied feet and those of her older companions. But the transport of Paris was always the first of the public services to react to the threat of disturbance, the omnibus companies because they feared to see their heavy vehicles pressed into the structure of barricades, the *fiacres* because they were apt to be made substitutes for chargers to bear would-be combatants to the scene of action. She had therefore to face the steep approaches to Montmartre on her own legs.

By the time she reached the Chaussée de Clignancourt she found herself alone, for her companions, with last handclasps and embraces, had dropped off by twos and threes to their own homes. She ascended Rue Muller with a slow step, a little light-headed from the glass of wine she had imprudently taken on an empty stomach before leaving the Committee Rooms, her sense of fatigue dulled by the dream in which she was plunged. The people, she kept on telling herself in ecstasy, had risen at one bound in their strength, and with scarcely a shot fired or a blow struck had driven their tyrants from their city. . . . Now, surely, the work of rebuilding, of justice and beneficence could be commenced without further delay!

Suddenly her eyes were recalled from their inner vision to reality by an obstruction looming across her path. It was a barricade of paving-stones, barrels and timber, at which she stared hardly comprehending. Over the top of it peered a head in a *képi* and bade her turn back.

"But I am Madame Caprano, who lives in the Château des Zéphirs. It is my way home!"

"You can't pass this way, Citizeness! *Rapport au Comité!* It's their orders. Go round by Rue Cottin!"

Ludovica turned away annoyed. Through narrow lanes, ahum with people holding rifles or cleaning them, she came out near the top of the Passage Cottin—only to find another barricade busily going up by the light of flares, while patriots passed drinks to the workers, and female patriots, assisting in skirts and chemises, seized

upon Ludovica and compelled her to help carry one stone, at any rate, to show her loyalty to the workers. But still they would not let her pass.

When at length she escaped, feeling bitterly guilty at having left Deodato all these hours without any news of her, and began to make a circuit by the northern slopes of the Butte, in hopes to find an entry that way, she reflected that if only these simple people knew it, there was no need at all for their barricades and rifles, their *képis* and bandoliers. It was Peace the Commune would give to Paris and to the world!

The thought heartened her, and enabled her limbs to bear her up steep stairways apparently deserted under the stars that sprinkled the keen spring night. These stairs brought her out at last into the Rue des Rosiers. It was a lane of small houses with gardens in front of them, from which the scent of growing things came soothingly to her nostrils as she entered it. There were no street-lamps, only candle-beams coming from between the cracks of shutters, except at one end, where the lane ended in a cul-de-sac, and a window on the ground floor of a larger, more important-looking house, with a paved court in front of it, made a yellow oblong against the romantic blue of the night. Round this window an agitation was going on, dark specks of heads bobbing up and down as if to see inside, amid a buzz of children's voices.

Tired as she was, Ludovica could not refrain from walking to the end of the street to find out what sort of peep-show it could be that was keeping these children out of bed so late and made them so unwisely excited. She threw open the gate, traversed the court, and joined the pushing, struggling crowd, in which small boys tried to climb up the iron bars of the windows while elder sisters held the toddlers up to peep between them.

The room into which she looked, a sort of store-room or cellar a foot or two below the level of the court outside, was illuminated by a single candle on a packing-case. Its rays fell direct on to two figures that seemed to be sleeping side by side underneath a horse-cloth. But in a moment it could be seen that they were too rigid to be sleepers. One of the faces turned up with closed eyes to the shadowy ceiling wore a straggling goatee, and was shown by the embroidery on the collar protruding from the blanket below it to be that of a General; it still retained its leathery look of routine. The other had a grizzled beard curving upward, as if set in a final,

implacable indignation. From a hole in the temple a trickle of blood had dried on the cheek, staining the white whisker.

"*Ah! Dio mio! Dio mio!*" sobbed Ludovica, shrinking away from the window. "What is this? Who are they? . . . Children, go away! Go away, I tell you! Who has let you see such a sight . . . and who has done this: who *can* have done it?"

The gamins scattered a little, alarmed by the strange, imperious lady who was trying to banish them from the enjoyment of their gruesome Guignol. Then in a sort of defiant chant they answered her: "It is the Generals . . . the Generals . . . the Generals who tried to kill the people! The people shot them. . . . *V'lan dans l'œil!*"

"Murderers!" shrieked Ludovica, recoiling with an arm over her eyes; but at that moment a hand, warm and thrilling, enveloped hers. She uncovered her eyes, and saw Louise Michel regarding her in the candlelight that streamed through the window with the strangest expression of mingled triumph and compassion.

"You must look at *that* no longer!" she commanded, drawing Ludovica away across the courtyard; "you must not think of it! It is the rude justice of the people—no affair of yours! . . . You are needed for other tasks! The freedom we have won this day will have to be fought for! Your place and mine is with the women and the children who must suffer in the travail of this great new birth. . . . No, Ludovica, you must not go home again! You are wedded henceforth to the Revolution!"

NOTRE DAME DES BARRICADES

(I)

WEEKS of a heady delirium which followed that eighteenth day of March until the twenty-first day of May! . . . Weeks in which the sap of spring that was garlanding the lawns of Paris with lilac and laburnum, draping the trees with triumphal banners of young green, healing the scars of the Bois with fresh hawthorn, ran also in the veins of men and women! . . . The old order had dissolved like a dream, and in the spaces of the new world that had risen overnight everything was feasible, everything was permissible! Humanity, staggering out of the shadow into a light as dazzling as the sunshine that bathed Paris reborn after the gloom of the siege, gave rein to every passion—exaltation and baseness, fraternity and revenge, aspiration after the new society and lust for the plunder of the old one.

The streets were a carnival of weird uniforms and fantastic costumes. Every dream was realised, every wish became fulfilment. The beggars were on horseback, galloping perilously through the crowded streets on confiscated chargers. Gold lace and flaming sash bedizened the threadbare tunic of the National Guardsman; "Generals" of every nationality and no verifiable promotion clattered by in carriages with liveried footmen on the rumble, attended by escorts like the choruses of *opéra bouffe*, heralded by black trumpeters flaunting turban and *guidon*. Italians, Poles, Hungarians, Germans—for this was Cosmopolis!—mingled in Free Corps as savage and bristling as Bashi-Bazouks, and crossed battalions of singing Amazons among the eddies on the boulevards. Fishwives ranted from the pulpits of churches, and the Infant Jesus in a Cap of Liberty clung to a Madonna crowned with a Guardsman's *képi*.

There was even the Saturnalian shadow of a Court, when in the reception rooms of the Hôtel de Ville, or even in some salon of the abandoned Tuileries, lit for an evening to drive away the ghosts, officers, delegates, committee-men circled, champagne-glass in

hand, about the uncrowned queens of the *régime*. Under the crystal lustres now moved the Russian, Elizabeth Dimitriev, with her melancholy eyes ; Lodoiska, the Pole, in her tasselled boots and blue Turco cap ; the Austrian, Reidenrath, in Zouave fez ; Lefèvre, the washerwoman of Batignolles, with cutlass and pistols at her girdle ; Louise Michel, in her dusty Guardsman's tunic ; and *la Générale Eudes*, fresh from reviewing her husband's troops in riding-skirt and red stole, or decked in rustling train and long, eight-buttoned gloves after the fashion of the departed Empress. Love blazed and died in these days like the explosion of a bomb ; and everywhere, from the looted cellars of palaces to the *bistros* of Belleville and Grenelle, the drink poured down fevered throats, recruiting exhausted nerves, whipping up passions, drowning reality in ever-fresh fiery visions . . .

On March 28th the Committee of the Federation had handed over its powers to the newly elected Commune of Paris. Blue sky, golden sunshine had greeted the ninety-odd saviours as they paraded in their scarves of office before the beflagged Hôtel de Ville, acclaimed by drums and salvos from the armed multitude filling the square. Then, as the sun went down encrimsoning the Seine, pushing their way with difficulty through the decorations that encumbered the façade, this strange, haphazard collection of Socialists, anarchists, internationalists, patriots *à outrance*, Utopians, bourgeois, Radicals ; this swarm of theorists, careerists, idealists, economists, criminals and secret agents sold to both sides ; this heterogeneous mob of politicians, lawyers, professors, artists, journalists, military adventurers, printers, cobblers, cabinet-makers, stole almost furtively into one of the dusty state-rooms of the Town Hall and called for lights.

The glimmer of scanty oil-lamps, hastily collected, shone presently upon the shadowy assemblage. Out of the dusk showed the wild bronze beard of Major Flourens, the chalky face of Ferré, the cherry-coloured lips of Assi, the dapper moustaches of General Eudes, the brown flames of Citizen Sambellini's eyes ; and around, behind them, more faces, better or less well-known at the clubs, more spectral forms still awaiting definition in the roll of history.

A ray fell upon the silver beard of Charles Beslay at the head of the long table. Presiding over the inauguration as the oldest member of the assembly, he once more sent resonantly through the gloom his gospel of Peace and Work, once more upheld before eyes

clouded with cigar-smoke, eyes vague with personal reveries, eyes crazed with the dream of vengeance, his vision of a regenerated Humanity . . . His oratory rose and fell to a continuous undertone of whispering, chattering and growling in the corners of the sombre room . . .

Peace and work? They could work, feverishly, bringing in the millennium on paper! With the amorphous vitality of a primitive organism this rude experiment in Communist government fissured into a series of Committees—for War, for Finance, for Education, for Public Security—unco-ordinated, chaotic, ignorant of affairs, devoid of administrative technique; with an Executive Committee to impose shape on the other Committees, and, looming in the background from the start, the design of a Committee of Public Safety to assume terrorist powers over all for the preservation of the new order. Edicts poured forth . . . disestablishment of the Church . . . reduction of rents . . . free justice for all . . . burning the guillotine . . . demolishing the Napoleon column on Place Vendôme . . . free redemption of pawnshop pledges . . . lay education . . . abolition of nightwork in bakeries . . . a pell-mell of the vast and the trivial, reforms, revolutions and fads.

Shifting like figures in a kaleidoscope from Committee to Committee, post to post, the dominant characters of the new oligarchy asserted themselves. Delescluze, the ancient Jacobin—grim, merciless, incorruptible, with his grizzled beard and yellow, pimpled face, the shadow of Robespierre in frock-coat and tall hat, an executive chief tending ever to dictatorship, and falling short of it to the ruin of his cause. The military leaders, headed by Cluseret, the Delegate for War—a cynical soldier-of-fortune, who had learnt his trade in the American civil conflict, while of the others General Bergeret had learnt his as a Sergeant of Voltigeurs; General Duval, his as a shoe-salesman; and General Eudes, his across a chemist's counter. Lastly, the Police Chief and Public Prosecutor, Raoul Rigault, a jovial, spectacled ruffian, wrapped in four overcoats with a ferocious hedge of beard, at whose heels trotted ever nowadays the epileptic dwarf Ferré, become his indispensable lieutenant.

Was there in the background another, more potent still? A man with one hand, who scorned office and the appearances of power, but had his *entrée* to every Committee and every Ministry, hinting, urging, relentlessly driving the Commune forward on the path of totalitarian Revolution, contemptuous of civic liberty and human

life, seeing only the goal of proletarian dictatorship? Iron amid waverers, disputers and benevolent dreamers, Citizen Sambellini, at last in reach of his life's ambition, traced out for more vaguely minded men who called themselves his leaders, the course of the great experiment in overthrow.

Peace and work? For Peace, that did not rest with the Commune. In Versailles a little old man with a cockatoo crest and gold spectacles worked remorselessly for War; disciplining the shaky regiments of March 18th anew to fit them for the re-conquest of the capital; shrinking from no humiliation; even begging from Bismarck the return of the captive armies of Sedan and Metz to put down the common enemy of European States. Vilified, loathed, denounced as the enemy of the people, the *capitulard*, the fomentor of civil war in face of the Germans, whose troops still occupied the Northern Forts of Paris, he toiled on at his programme of pitiless patriotism. In the head behind the gleaming spectacles were mapped the hard foundations of a re-constituted France. These were the restoration of national unity, the deliverance of the occupied territory by prompt payment of the war indemnity, undisturbed work to build up the financial strength needed for this task—the forging of a new Army, without frills or flunkeyism, that should one day recover Alsace and Lorraine.

Harsh, unsympathetic, egotistical old man, toddling through the Hall of Mirrors at Versailles, after daunting the Assembly in the former Court Theatre nearby, and driving together under his whip Republicans, Royalists, Imperialists towards a single national aim, he perhaps saw visions . . . a very different Treaty, maybe, to be signed here where the mirrors had lately reflected the tribes of Germany acclaiming the Prussian King as first Emperor of the new Reich built on the blood and bones of France . . . And Paris stormed against the betrayer of his country.

(2)

Stormed . . . and prepared to pit the enthusiasm of the Revolution against the cold, surgical programme of delivery. On the morning of April 3rd a torrent burst from the walls of Paris. It was a torrent in arms that spread itself over the roads to the south-west of the capital, flowing in dark streams through the spring greenery towards Versailles, but scarcely an army. Loosely shaken into three masses, without artillery or convoys or staff-connexions—

a right wing flanked by Major Flourens, his beard streaming and his eyes blazing more wildly than ever, and commanded by General Bergeret in a carriage; a centre led by General Eudes; and a left by General Duval—it spread itself like a tidal wave over the country from Courbevoie to Chatillon.

Military march, from the sea of bayonets that sparkled in the happy April sun, pilgrimage, from the exalted faces of the half-uniformed mob that composed it, more eager to grasp the hands than pierce the bodies of its Versaillesse opponents, it had also a strong flavour of pic-nic, as its members slipped into the garden-cafés they passed for a quick glass, or shouted for the coquettishly-skirted cantinières, or stuck sprigs of leaf and blossom in their head-gear to celebrate the unwon victory. The boughs nodded at them; the breezes scattered balm; the mounting sun made slivers of gold-leaf out of the windows of Fort Mont-Valérien, watching them from behind its casemates on its steep cone above the plain.

Many onlookers followed—pedestrians, riders, vehicles; and among these a two-horsed carriage was prominent, forcing its way, not without protests, into the very files of the right-wing column as it swirled towards Rueil from Neuilly, its commander's coach rumbling in the front, and an Arab orderly caracoling beside it. In this carriage sat two women, Louise Michel, excited and anxious, her long upper lip pulled down nervously as she darted her head in and out of the windows on this side and that, and Ludovica, calmer though strung to the pitch of expectation, and with a little guilt in the back of her mind at having left her husband on a sick bed in Montmartre, to see this military promenade. Ludovica had resisted Louise's entreaties on the night of March 18th to follow her and abandon her married life until the triumph of the Revolution. She had gone home, in a tumult of perplexity and horror, to find Deodato in bed, his arm in plaster, his face and limbs bruised, his nerves shattered. For a few days she had thought of nothing but nursing him, and had resisted invitations to attend the inauguration of the Commune from Louise, from Charles Beslay, from Commandant Assi, who even offered her a seat in his private box on the *estrade* of the Hôtel de Ville.

But as Deodato recovered from the first feverishness and the acuter pain of his injuries, he perceived with a lover's intuition her restlessness and need for action on behalf of her new ideal. He realised its tyranny over her, marked how she wrapped herself

in Louise's sophisms to excuse the murders of Montmartre, and fixed her eyes only on the hope the Commune had set star-like before her. Bewildered himself by the march of events, he was almost thankful for his disablement, since it relieved him of the necessity of taking his own part in the quarrel. He knew, however, that if he had been well he would have followed her wherever she chose to lead him; bottling up his scepticism with an Italian shrug; abandoning his private desires with the submissive fatalism that had enabled him to bear by turns the yoke of the convent, of Marsh's studio, of the travelling showman, of the Court, the Army, and, at all times, of Ludovica herself.

Carpeaux had discerned shrewdly enough his strength and his weakness, both as man and as artist. He always accepted, but seldom shaped. He absorbed life and love, enriching himself with all their joys and all their pains, but he let the stream carry him whither it would. The gulf between his intuitions and his achievements as a sculptor was an index to the disparity between his passionate experiencing and his lack of structural purpose in living. Carpeaux had not understood it, nor had little Marsh, nor his father, nor even Ludovica with all her love of him. But none of them could enter with him that secret place of vision where Life justified itself with a terrible splendour that transcended plans, ambitions, principles and codes.

So now when he saw Ludovica fretting with the need to express herself in a new mode and discharge her energy through a fresh channel, he could not maintain his first protest. And when Louise Michel had assured him that she would bring his wife into no danger by taking her to Porte Maillot in a carriage to watch the march-out to victory of the soldiers of the Commune, and when he saw the light in Ludovica's eyes at the proposal, he assented to her going. Perhaps he privately agreed that there would be no danger for a reason different from the Red virago's. He did not believe the Communards would ever advance to the point of danger against trained troops. These "Federal Guards," as they now dubbed themselves, were only his own former National Guardsmen; he had a sardonic view of their fighting qualities.

He might, however, have felt differently if he had been there to see Louise's serene disregard of her promise to him when she ordered the coachman to drive on through the Porte Maillot and out through the suburbs on the heels of the advancing host. He

would certainly now have compelled the driver to turn his horses round and retreat, when he found the carriage advancing at an impeded walk in the midst of the turbid Communist soldiery, through villages and along country lanes right under the height of Mont-Valérien, with its garrison of Versailles troops.

As it was, nobody seemed to worry much about its potentialities. The rank and file of the Communist Army were convinced that the red pantaloons would never turn the great guns of the Forts upon their brothers. General Bergeret inside his coach was poring over his maps, wondering how far Flourens had advanced; Louise Michel, gazing backwards out of the window, was anxious chiefly about the blocking of the roads behind them, which they had noticed as they came along; the troops in blue *képis* and workmen's caps around them were laughing, chaffing and sharing the contents of their haversacks. Ludovica, lulled by the sense of joyous fraternity all around her, was drinking in the beauty of the sun-bathed landscape, pricking everywhere with the shoots of the reviving year, the new year that would bring the earth a message it had never known! The doll's house yonder on its lofty sugar-loaf, with the row of toy-trees along its base, seemed, as she gazed through her glass at it, no more than a knick-knack lending a final touch of decoration to the scene.

And it was she alone who saw the two bluish puffs that shot out from those distant, innocuous casemates. She stared at them with her small mouth falling open in dismay. The next moment the crash of the shells burst from behind some cottages on a rise ahead, and a billow of shrieks, curses and shouts swept along the ragged column, liquefying its files into a mob. The terrified horses reared and plunged, and dragged the carriage round across the road. Men went down under the hoofs and wheels; others caught at the horses' heads; others, shrieking "Treason!" raised their butts and shivered the windows, while a shot went through and splintered the roof. Louise sprang out on to the road on the far side from where Ludovica sat, waving her arms and screaming, "Friends! Friends! . . . Do not fire on us, comrades! . . . Rally! Rally!"

Her voice was drowned. The road in an instant had become a flood racing in the opposite direction from that in which it had been flowing. Arms, bandoliers, *képis* were flung away; the scrunch of running feet drowned all other sounds—cries, commands, the scattered shots of the advanced detachments pelting the distant Fort with rifle-fire as effective as pea-shooters.

Louise had vanished. Ludovica clutched at the cushions as the carriage backed violently, cracking the glass of her lorgnette, and its back-wheels slid into the ditch. She scrambled to the tilted window and stared out at the seething stream of fugitives; saw the Arab orderly wheeling in circles in the midst uttering hoarse shouts, and then caught a glimpse of Bergeret, whose coach had been shattered in the discharge from the Fort, on foot in the midst of the throng, gesticulating frenziedly, his General's sash twisted round his throat and impeding his speech as he was borne along in the rout. The two field-guns attached to the column opened fire out of sight beyond the houses, and the Fort puffed and crashed again, setting seal on the panic and dissolving the last resistance.

And then Ludovica saw a sight that made her wrench madly at the handle of the jammed door, until she had opened it wide enough to be able to twist herself out with torn clothes on to the roadway. Wounded were being brought along—a fair-headed boy of eighteen or so, deathly-pale, supported by two comrades; an old man carried chairwise by a Sergeant and a distracted woman, his tongue lolling out; a mangled form on a gate. All around rose a whimpering moan, "Treason!" "Cowards!" "Massacres of the people!" Ludovica, after a moment's helplessness as she realised that she had no hospital aids with her, stooped and, in a flame of indignation at what she took for a fratricidal assault, began to rip up her torn petticoat for bandages. . . .

That night and the next day were passed by Deodato in agonised suspense. Ludovica had not returned, and no message had come from her. The wildest rumours reached Montmartre about the fighting on the route to Versailles. By the evening of April 4th, the extent of the Communist disaster was known. Everywhere their demoralised troops had been driven back, on the south to the shelter of the forts, on the west to Neuilly and the suburbs. Worse than that, they had lost two of their leaders, Duval and Flourens. Worse than that, the Versailles had shown in what spirit they meant to wage this civil war. Duval had been put up against a wall and shot, after being taken prisoner; Flourens had had his skull split open with a sabre-stroke from a Gendarme, after surrender. . . . Immediately, on a whispered word from Citizen Sambellini, Raoul Rigault went grinning with an order wrenched from the Commune to

arrest the Archbishop of Paris and a number of other prominent clergy to be held as hostages.

Deodato rose from his bed to find his wife. He collapsed upon the floor, and lay prostrate for two more days while old Benedetta tottered about Paris on her ancient legs, seeking news in vain. As soon as the recrudescence of his fever abated Deodato dressed and made another attempt to sally from the château. He found a sentry at each issue, Federal Guards, who were civil and even kind to him (for he was still popular in the neighbourhood) but who insisted that they had orders to keep him under close observation—"orders from Citizen Ferré of the *Sûreté Générale*." What for? What was he suspected of? The men did not know, and the officer commanding the guard, who demanded to see him night and morning, could or would tell him nothing further. He returned to the studio, and sat down in his loneliness, feeling insanity creeping upon him. . . .

The bright April days that mocked him through the windows while they dragged by, inflicting torments as slow as the fabled Chinese drip of water, were meanwhile rushing over the head of Ludovica in a storm of agitation, noise and bloodshed. On the night of the rout before Mont-Valérien she had succeeded, with other helpers who had medical requisites, in bringing her desperately wounded men back as far as the suburb of Neuilly on the edge of the Bois du Boulogne beyond the Porte Maillot. Into this outpost the Communist troops flung themselves; rallied, erected barricades and stood to face the bombardment of the steadily advancing army of Versailles.

Two of Ludovica's charges died in the night, but the next day there were more to tend from the shells of the Versailles batteries, opening their bombardment of the western front of Paris. She was called hither and thither, and, encumbered by the tatters of her long dress, resolved to take example by Louise and don uniform. Steeled against horror by the sights and sounds that hourly confronted her, her mind filled with the one thought of rendering succour to the victims of the Versaillese savagery—innocent victims, one and all, in her eyes—she took the sheet from the dead body of a slim young Communist officer lying on a bed in her improvised hospital, and dressed herself in his tunic, breeches and riding-boots. So she was free to move from point to point wherever her services were needed, blessed wherever the golden helmet of her uncovered hair appeared through the battle-fumes, bearing bandages, medica-

ments, and brandy from the little barrel slung across her shoulders to the suffering.

Two days, three days thus passed . . . she could hardly count them. Then, emerging from a house filled with wounded into the afternoon blaze of the street outside, Ludovica beheld the enemy pouring up towards the barricade that closed it, their red *képis* bobbing as they ran. Musketry wrapped the barricade in smoke; when this thinned it showed the Versaillese swarming over and through it, and the Federal Guards streaming back in confusion, the blood-coloured flag of the Commune lying in the dust. Fury seized Ludovica at the sight; and, scarcely knowing what she did, she caught at the bridle of a white horse from which a Federal officer had just fallen, and swung herself into the saddle. The charger swerved and cavorted, and she was unused to riding astride. Nevertheless, driving her feet deep into the stirrups, she held her seat while she waved encouragement to the disordered blue infantry. With the mutability of French moral, they began to clot round this visionary figure on the white horse, with its golden locks tossing and its dazzling throat shining through the unhooked collar of the tunic. In a few minutes Ludovica was the centre of a volleying resistance, which checked the advance of the red-trousered Linesmen; and though the recapture of the barricade was impossible, a fighting retreat through the outskirts of Neuilly organised itself round this knot of revived heroism.

At sunset she found herself riding in the midst of a solid column under the Porte Maillot, with the gunners of the battery cheering, the Federal officers to whom she had given the chance of bringing away their men in safety crowding round to grasp her hand, and Commandant Assi, who had galloped up to the Gate to meet them, leaning from his saddle to embrace her and offer her his sword. More than the unwelcome flame of his kiss, the proffer of his sabre shocked her into her sober senses again. She repelled the weapon with a gesture. "*Non, non et non!*" she shouted. "I do not take life; I save it!" Her protest was drowned in the triumphant uproar; and when, after slipping exhausted from her horse, she begged to be allowed to return home to see her husband, they crowded round her—their new mascot—and refused with cries, tears and entreaties, backed by a hedge of bayonets formed round her path, to let her desert them even for a night. They would only permit her to scribble a letter to Deodato, imploring his forgiveness

and trying to impart to him the need and the vision that kept her at her post. And this letter Commandant Assi, after he had opened it and read it with his melancholy smile, used to light his cigar with.

In the days that ensued the new bombardment of Paris mounted to full-throated thunder; tumbling Neuilly into ruin; reaching overhead to Porte Maillot and the ramparts, whence the Communist guns replied with fury; flaking the sculpture of the Arc de Triomphe, dropping its messengers of ruin among the elegant grey houses and the chestnut blossom of the Champs-Élysées and Ternes quarters—M. Thiers cared nothing for the property of his class in the ruthlessness of his national aim. Every day now, directed by Marshal Mac-Mahon, returned from his German captivity, the red pantaloons thrust forward, by park and village, amid the resurgent greenery of the Bois, trampling down its tender life, quenching the caress of its spring odours in the salt of gunpowder, defiling the rivulets, choking the carpeted dells with broken branches and shattered men. One of their guns reduced Cythère with all its treasures to a charred shell, fit pendant to the burnt-out Château of Saint-Cloud upon the hill above. Overhead the sky flamed majestic, as young Summer, too, pursued her advance towards the abandoned shell of Paris's stateliest quarter, contemptuous of all this smoking pother underneath her sandals.

In the first days of May a haggard man with an arm in splints presented himself at the barrier set up by the Arc de Triomphe, and pleaded with the Guards on duty there for leave to proceed to the Porte Maillot in search of his wife. The day before, Deodato had found the sentries gone from his house, without warning or reason given, as mysteriously as they had arrived. He had rushed to the governing Committee of Montmartre for explanation and redress, but had gained little from that body, dominated by the chinless poet Clément, most blood-thirsty of songsters, and the black-bearded cobbler Dereure, formerly Clemenceau's Deputy as Mayor. They refused to tell him anything, but bade him watch his steps carefully as a notorious Bonapartist, and he withdrew with an uneasy sense of further dealings to come with these functionaries.

Where to find Ludovica in this distracted wilderness of Paris, without regular police or other organs of investigation? He had gone in despair the next day into a café on the Place du Tertre, and there heard some Federal Guards who had been down to the Porte

Maillot celebrating the feats of a woman whom they called *Notre Dame des Barricades*, a woman Italian and golden-haired! . . . It could not be Ludovica unless she had gone mad . . . and yet who else could it be? At any rate it was a possibility, a clue to follow. . . . And now beneath the Arc de Triomphe, with the Étoile around it deserted under the afternoon sun, for the shells from the Versailles guns, whining and making smoke-tracks in the sky as they came, were falling lavishly into this district, he was held up in shouted wrangle against the bombardment with these obstinate sentries.

A mounted officer clattered at top speed across the place, bending low against his horse's neck for safety, and reined up under shelter of the arch. Deodato recognised Commandant Assi, and with a gleam of hope rushed to his stirrup-iron and poured out his story.

When his hoarse, exhausted voice died away Assi with deliberation lit a cigar, and said insolently in Italian, "I advise you to return to your house and keep very quiet."

"But my wife, *Signor Comandante*!"

"I know nothing of anybody's wife in these days!" Assi smiled with lazy scorn. "Women and men alike all belong to the Revolution. . . . If it is your wife who is doing her duty on the barricades at Porte Maillot, do you expect that it is I who will call her away?"

"Citizen Assi, you have enjoyed my hospitality——"

"And out of friendship, Captain Caprano of the Empress's Dragoons," Assi's red lips curved again in mockery, "I am so far failing in my duty to the Commune as to allow you to turn about and march, back to your château on Montmartre! I ought instead to send you under escort to Citizen Rigault or Citizen Ferré for examination. . . . Take my hint, *Signor Capitano*! Do not be visible when I return here in a quarter of an hour. . . ."

If Assi thus let Ludovica's husband go free, he had with the utmost skill kept Ludovica a prisoner under the forms of honour. He had realised at once the magnetic effect her presence had upon the men under his command. The day after she had prevented the rout in the outskirts of Neuilly he had persuaded her to mount the white horse again, and, attended by two gaolers under the title of orderlies, to accompany a counter-attack that won back a good part of that strategically vital suburb. She had not been altogether reluctant, though she refused to carry any weapon but a riding-switch, and still wore her bag of medical appliances slung from one

shoulder and her little barrel from the other, resolved to keep the tending of the wounded her prime concern. Her days now were passed wherever the conflict centred, on suburban barricades, in thickets and ambushes of the Bois, on the battery before the Gate or along the adjacent ramparts. At nights she slept, when she slept, in an abandoned villa in the Avenue de Neuilly near the wall, where sentries were always posted, out of watchful respect, and the Red flag flown from the damaged roof, as if the place were the headquarters of a General.

Assi's other motive in holding Ludovica a virtual prisoner he was subtle enough not to disclose prematurely. He realised that she was not a woman to be taken by a brusque assault, and reckoned that her nerves must first be worn down, her mind shaken by barricade war, with its febrile agitation, sleeplessness and constant peril, before he could present himself to her with the glamour of a hero—perhaps a saviour. Nor was his design forwarded by the fact that, while his policy was to send her to the firing line as the mascot of the Revolution, his own resolve was to keep well in the administrative rear of his command, since he knew he was no tactician. Also he had no wish to be arrested again, as he had been once already, by rivals in the Commune, if he tried to make himself too conspicuous a leader.

As this febrile, perilous life took hold of Ludovica, she felt her imprisonment less, her sense of kinship with the fighting men growing. Here where the hard knocks were being endured she encountered, naturally, none of the political riff-raff of the movement, who were all in posts of authority well inside Paris, and only met the honest fanatics among the leaders, the loyal soldiers of the Revolution among the working-men of the rank and file. There was something that pierced her soul in the very modesty of their demands. If asked what they were fighting for, these journeymen and labourers would answer, "*un peu de justice . . . un peu de bonheur . . . un peu de pain pour les affamés*," always that "little bit" of happiness or bread which they believed they and their comrades had the right to, and no more!

Even more heart-rending was the spectacle of the boys, urchins of fourteen or twelve years, who, with the mischievousness of their age turned to dare-devilry, insisted on taking their turn at the guns, or on creeping out as scouts, greeting the shells with wild waving of the *képis* that extinguished their small heads, accepting

the bullets or splinters that cut short their brief holiday with a heroic tremble of lips that struggled to keep stiff, a heroic spark in eyes that tried to give a dare to death. In the crazy phantasmagoria of her days *Notre Dame des Barricades* had to pillow the heads of these savage innocents upon her bosom when they cried for their mothers in the final agonies, just as she had to respond with her own hand to the cold clasp of the expiring carpenter or market-gardener who fancied he was taking leave of wife or daughter, and surrender her lips to the last kiss of the student idealist who panted his way into the unseen on a surge of transfigured passion. . . . She gladly gave all to console the dying, just as she willingly faced all to encourage the fighters, stoically bearing the shock when her white horse was shot under her in a rush upon the bridge at Neuilly, and the pain when a fragment of shell from a field-gun grazed her forehead at the barricade before the Porte Maillot. . . . And always she refused a weapon—sabre, rifle or pistol she thrust alike aside, crying with sublime unconsciousness that she was not a combatant.

(4)

It was now the middle of May, sultry weather broken by drenching showers, weather to exasperate tempers, madden nerves and whip passions to frenzy. Only little M. Thiers, trotting through the corridors of Versailles, rubbed his ear with content and let his thin lips curve into a smile. His army, swollen by the released Regulars from the German prisons, increased daily in strength and discipline ; it daily tightened its girdle round all the circumference of Paris except that Northern sector by Saint-Denis where the Prussian lines maintained a benevolent neutrality. Issy, Vanves and Montrouge, the Southern Forts, could not hold out much longer against his artillery ; Neuilly was a smoking pile of ruin ; the Porte Maillot and its ramparts a mass of wreckage that only fanatics could try to defend.

The end would come now when he wished it to ; when he felt strong enough to make a bound that should annihilate the remaining defences of insurgent Paris.

Within the walls, distraction, chaos and fury prevailed. Commander after Commander was tried by the Commune, suspected, cashiered, imprisoned and re-instated again. The Pole, Dombrowski, Rossel, an ex-officer of the Imperial Army, driven to revolt by the

infamy of Metz, Bergeret, Cluseret—all had their day of adulation, their day of disgrace; and only the cold fury of Delescluze outrode the storm, gradually concentrating into his inexperienced civilian hands the entire military authority.

Inside the city the new Committee of Public Safety was now supreme, terrorising opposition, sweeping reluctant conscripts into the Federal Guards, harrying religion, giving rein to the most grotesque excesses of fanaticism. Daily Raoul Rigault and his satellites pounced on churches to despoil them and convents to insult them; the Paris house of Thiers was solemnly demolished, the column of the Place Vendôme ritually dragged down with ropes. . . . It was all of no avail; Fort Issy fell on May 8th, Fort Montrouge on May 14th.

It was on the afternoon of that day that Deodato, alone in the little salon of the Château des Zéphirs, heard a footfall upon the step of the front-door, which stood open for coolness . . . He had been sitting in a sort of mournful stupefaction, wondering now if he should ever see his wife again. He had tried every means to get a pass into the fighting-zone, approached every Communist he had any acquaintance with, sought audience of Rossel, as an old companion-in-arms of Metz, and of War Delegate Delescluze, even petitioned the dread Committee of Public Safety itself. He had tried to get into touch with Louise Michel, only to learn that she was fighting in the ranks at one of the Forts, with Ludovica's brother, only to find that Citizen Sambellini was *introuvable* . . . He had even meditated an attempt to get over the ramparts with a rope, despite his injuries—only to realise that he would be shot by the sentries on the counterscarp, and how would that help Ludovica? . . .

He suddenly realised that the footstep had entered the house and was coming down the passage. He sprang up apprehensively; he knew the heavy sound of a military boot, and wondered if it meant his arrest. Before he could reach the door of the salon it opened, and Ludovica stood before him.

He gazed at her wondering if he had turned delirious. This figure in the soiled tunic of a Federal Guardsman, breeched and booted, a bandage round its forehead—it could not be . . . but it *was* Ludovica, her cheeks hollowed under their wide ridges, her eyes vanished, it seemed, into the black shadows beneath which they were sunk, the gold of her hair bleached and faded from untended

exposure to the sun . . . On the recognition he would have rushed into her arms, but for the awe that seized him as she advanced with a slow step towards him. In a flash there passed before his mental gaze and shrivelled up his statue *Paris aux abois*, that lean spitfire, so tart and shrewish ! What significance had she, compared to this new Ludovica, male in her strength and swinging stride, female still in the curves and fullness of her figure beneath the uniform, the compassion of a Madonna in her enlarged mouth, the defiance of a warrior in the poise of her wounded head ?

"Ludovica !" he pleaded in a frightened voice, stretching out his arms.

She took one step, two steps more towards him ; then with a moan like a little girl's crumpled up and fell forward in a heap on the floor.

He rushed to her aid, shouting to Benedetta, who came pattering along the passage, screamed, and, lifting Ludovica's white face in her hands, covered it with kisses, crying, "My blessed, blessed Signorina, my dove, my little angel !"

"But do something, Benedetta !" raged Deodato. "You see I cannot raise her ! Help me get her on this couch . . . run for a doctor !"

Ludovica opened her eyes, and smiled at them both. "It is nothing," she murmured, "I am not hurt . . . not ill . . . it was the joy of seeing you, beloved . . . You can take this bandage off, Benedetta, dear !"

They were relieved to find that the wrapping was only protection for the red arrow left on her forehead by the shell-splinter ; and when, after a sip of brandy brought by Benedetta, she curled up on the sofa with her head lying peacefully on her husband's breast, they accepted her statement that she needed no doctor.

"But you must go to bed, at once !" commanded Benedetta.

"I have so much to tell," she answered, looking up at Deodato as if asking childish permission to sit up a little longer.

"No !" retorted Benedetta with an authoritative stamp. "The Signorina will go to bed at once . . . and not talk at all !"

"I am not seventeen still, Benedetta !" answered Ludovica with feeble mutiny.

"Benedetta," said Deodato. "Is there no food for her ? You can see she is famished !"

"*Ah ! Signore Dio !*" Benedetta smote herself in reproach, and pattered away towards the kitchen.

"Now," murmured Deodato, holding her more tightly with his one available arm, and seeking out her pale lips, "now what is it you want to tell me ? Oh ! my own, why did you . . . how could you leave me like that . . . without a word ?"

Ludovica was appalled to learn that not one of the letters she had tried to send him had reached him. But she recognised at once the hand of Assi . . . She would still be a prisoner, she knew, if he had not within the last day or two abruptly disappeared from his command in the Neuilly sector. Dombrowski the Pole, who had taken over the leadership in that part of the line, had no love for the Italian, and Assi had discreetly vanished to take up a safe post, for which he had been some time intriguing, as Delegate to the War Arsenal . . . he had begun life as a metallurgist. With his disappearance the strict surveillance over the heroine of the barricades had lapsed, and being under no military authority really, Ludovica had not taken long in finding an opportunity to escape and return to her husband.

She told Deodato this briefly . . . a little of her experiences with the troops . . . something more of the faith and pity which had sustained her . . . since that, she knew, was her only apology for her desertion of her husband.

"If I had known . . . if I had understood," he said, kissing her long, begrimed fingers passionately, "I would have found some way to join you . . . disabled or not ! But I was kept a prisoner, too . . . oh ! do not look frightened, it was all a misunderstanding, I think, and I am safe now . . . and then I could by no means get a pass through the Gates to go in search of you . . . and not knowing where you were, I could not even send a message to you."

She interrupted him, raising her face to his ; a pink flush had stolen into it. "Kiss me, my husband," she murmured, "again . . . again . . . and now," she let her head droop again on his breast, "I shall tell you how . . . you did . . . send a message to me . . . which has brought me back . . . never, never to part from you again."

"How ?" he stammered. "I don't understand, Ludovica."

"Deodato," her voice was a whisper, "when I fainted just now on the floor . . . it was not the scratch from M. Thiers's mercenaries . . . it was not sickness or fatigue . . . but . . . something else I have discovered in this last week . . . and cannot doubt." She

began to laugh and cry together. "An old cantinière down yonder told me how it was with me when I swooned under the cannonade, and gave me her blessing . . . Deodato I have returned, to bring you back our child!"

(5)

The next day, sitting under the lilac-trees in the garden of the villa, with only the distant mutter of the bombardment coming against the wind from the west to mar the radiance of the day with menace, Deodato discussed with a Ludovica now returned to feminine clothes and languid after her prolonged strain, the problem of escape from Paris. He was urgent from the first, despite her cries, that she must go as soon as she could—and without him.

"Come, my dear! be reasonable!" he pleaded. "You know you must not wait till the Versailles force their way in, and there is fighting in every street, round the barricades, and . . . what do I know? . . . they may perhaps put the city to sack for a punishment!"

"It would be like them!" murmured Ludovica with a sudden flame of hatred in her tired eyes; and then irrelevantly, "How grey your hair has grown, my darling. One sees it in this sun . . . You have suffered worse than I have!"

"But that does not matter!" he insisted. "The question is now, how you are to escape from Paris!"

"If it is not too late," she said sombrely, plucking to pieces a spray of lilac in her fingers.

"Ludovica!" he cried, hurt and bewildered at the apparent waywardness that had come over her since her days upon the barricades. He began to realise that they had borne their natural fruit in an internal exhaustion, a species of fatalism. "Ludovica," he said more gently, "the child!"

She roused herself with a shiver. "What am I saying? Yes, how shall it be done?"

"For you alone, it should not be too difficult. You must have earned friendships among the men of the Commune by your deeds. And you are a woman; it is not like one of their soldiers deserting . . . especially in your condition! You should be able to obtain a pass through the German lines yonder," he jerked his thumb over his shoulder towards Saint-Denis. "By that issue you will be safe

from possible reprisals by the Versailles. Could not Beslay obtain this for you . . . or one of their Generals who knows what you have done . . . or," he hesitated, "even Piero, inhuman brother that he is . . . or perchance Louise?"

"But not without you, Deodato!"

"Can you see them granting *me* a pass? . . . I told you, I am a suspect, God knows why! Because I once fought for France in a different uniform, I suppose! It would be putting my head in the lion's jaws to demand permission to go. I tell you, dearest, hard as it is, I must wait . . . till M. Thiers and Marshal Mac-Mahon come to deliver me. Then I will join you . . . in England."

She was about to object when a shadow darted like a snake's tongue across the path in front of the seat, and Citizen Sambellini walked rapidly round the clump of lilac-bushes and stood frowning at them.

Ludovica rose and fell upon his neck with all her old devotion.

"That will do," he said, putting her aside, as usual. "So you have come home, madwoman, have you? They told me so at the Committee of Public Safety . . . They learn everything there that is of no importance."

"Sit down, Piero," said Deodato, rising to make place for him on the rustic seat. He thought his brother-in-law looked tired and dejected.

"What is your news?" demanded Ludovica. "Is there any hope?"

"Hope? What hope should there be?" Piero turned a whiter and more serious face to her than Deodato had yet seen upon him at any time, even in the moments of his most desperate personal peril. "This great experiment," he waved his arm despairingly over Paris; "it is ended!"

"Ended? Ah! no!" cried Ludovica, tears brimming out of her eyes. "Do not say that, little brother! It cannot be!"

"Since I tell you it is! . . . Ruined by the folly, the cowardice, the stupidity of those who should have carried it to triumph! But they have done nothing right . . . have spared their enemies . . . slighted their friends . . . senselessly outraged those they should have won to their side . . . as if it were worth losing Paris, as they have done, to prohibit a Mass! But that has been their record from the first day to the last—which cannot now be far off!"

Deodato exchanged glances with Ludovica. "You think," he asked, "that the city will soon fall?"

Piero rounded on him with the ghost of his old snarl. "Don't exult too much, Brother Deodato! There will be surprises before the end!"

"I do not exult," answered Deodato, "and your sister, you know, suffers as much as you at the burial of her hopes. But, Piero, I now appeal to you as a brother! Ludovica is *enceinte*. She must be helped to escape from Paris before the last convulsions."

Piero stared gloomily at his sister, but said nothing.

"I will not go without my husband," said Ludovica.

"*Tonnerre de Dieu!* What do either of you expect I should do? Is it *my* child? . . . My child, the fruit of all my life's hopes, struggles, sacrifices, is dying . . . and they are going to suffocate it in blood!"

"Piero!" Deodato laid his hand gently on his shoulder. "Have you no heart of flesh still in your body?"

Le Manchot grimaced and shrugged off his touch. "I can only advise you," he said to his sister, "to make interest with some one who has power in these matters—Delescluze, Rigault, Ferré—no, Ferré is a toad, he will help nobody—Eudes, perhaps; you must get on his wife's soft side, with a present of jewellery. *Tiens!* I will tell you what I will do. To show that they have no fear these stupid *fanfarons* are holding a reception in the Tuileries on Saturday night. If Thiers is not enthroned there in place of *Badinguet* by then, I will introduce you. Then you must work for yourself. Nobody will do me a favour. Sight of me is loathsome to them. I am the man who has always been right. So much, however, I will do for you, Ludovica . . . But for you, dear brother of mine," he swivelled round in his seat, "nothing! Nothing at all!"

"Piero," said Deodato humbly. "I twice saved you from your enemies!"

"For a reward! And you have had it . . . evidently!" He grinned with a shade of his old Mephistophelean malice, and Deodato turned away from him in disgust and walked towards the house.

"One moment!" Piero called after him. "I will be good to you so far as to give you a piece of advice. You had better be more careful, *fratellino mio!* You receive highly compromising communications up here!"

Deodato turned sharply. "What do you mean by that? For a month, I have not had a letter or a note of any kind . . . or a visitor!"

"H'm," Piero twisted his beard. "Things have been written to you, anyhow, and intercepted . . . not for your bodily health!"

"Piero, explain!" cried Ludovica. "You cannot frighten us like this and be silent. Who threatens him and why?"

Piero shrugged his shoulders wearily. "*Fichez-moi la paix!* It is the secret of the Committee . . . I do not suppose it will harm him to be written to . . . so long as he makes no answer!"

Ludovica accompanied him to the garden-gate. It was a very still evening; from a shed across the road, owned by a dairyman, cows were lowing. Piero looked up at the sky, overspread with sunset flakes. "Red, little sister!" he said. "Red!" and unlatched the gate.

In the west the guns of Versailles still muttered.

(6)

Ludovica felt a ghost herself when on the Saturday night she ascended the Grand Staircase of the Tuileries, haunted by so many memories, in her plain black dress and veil with a single crimson flower at her bosom. The stair seemed only half-lit compared with her memories, and the élite squad of Communist Guards lining it, though brushed and polished for the occasion in a special red uniform, made a dull substitute for the glittering Cent-Gardes.

Only a corner of the Palace had been thrown open for the function, the Guard-Room at the top of the staircase with the Salon de la Paix opening out of it on one side and the Arched Gallery on the other. In the Guard-Room, attended by two *officiers d'ordonnance*, War Delegate Delescluze stood to do the honours of the reception, dressed in his invariable frock-coat with red sash across it, his bilious face set and unsmiling as ever, while he acknowledged rather than welcomed his guests with wooden bows. This reception was an official duty, which he performed with the same punctiliousness and disregard of his inaptitude that he showed in organising the military forces of the Commune or re-ordering the structure of society.

In a corner, however, where the ante-room gave on to the Arched Gallery and its buffet served by waitresses wearing Phrygian caps,

la Générale Eudes was holding a more smiling reception of her own, magnificent in a silk train, with her long gloves à *l'Impératrice* and a wonderful new diamond necklace.

From the Salon de la Paix on the other side came the strains of a small string-band playing a Waldteufel valse with the eeriness of an echo. This room was crowded with the usual throng of officers, sashed politicians, journalists in jackets, artists smoking pipes, women wearing with awkwardness décolleté dresses from the wardrobes of "occupied" mansions belonging to Versailles sympathisers—and Louise Michel in her battle-stained tunic and dusty gaiters.

Her figure provided a comment on the *embourgeoisement* of the rest of the gathering, since there seemed no longer any desire even on the part of its most plebeian members to flaunt the costume of the working-class; it also offered the sole evidence amid the chatter and laughter, the playing off of *blagues* and the sipping of wine from the Imperial cellars, that any peril overhung the assemblage. It seemed as if not one of the guests had observed the red flashes in the southern sky across the river which had been visible to Ludovica as she drove up to the Court of the Carrousel in a fiacre with her brother.

Piero, with the brief remark, "Now, use your own wits!" had deserted Ludovica as soon as they entered the salon, and shortly afterwards had succeeded in drawing Delescluze aside into the embrasure of a window, to pour a string of remonstrances into the ancient Jacobin's unflinching ear.

For a few moments Ludovica gazed around her, bewildered. The riotous colour and gilding looked tarnished; the crystal chandeliers were dimmed with neglect. Over the mantelpiece the space where an equestrian portrait of Napoleon III used to hang was covered by a red drapery embroidered with the words "Liberty . . . Equality . . . Fraternity." The statue of Peace under its columned canopy had been invested with membership in the Commune by a gold-fringed sash. She recalled how often she had walked in the train of the Empress through this room, passing to a ball in the salon of the Marshals, now lying black behind locked doors, or crossing in the inverse direction towards the Chapel behind the Arched Gallery.

Then Louise Michel saw her and came up to greet her, and by degrees she was recognised by a number of officers and some members of the Commune and its Committees, who knew her legend, but had

not at first realised who she was in her unassuming feminine dress. . . . But none of these, though they courted and complimented her, would be willing or able, she felt, to help her in her present need; and her heart was sinking when she saw Commandant Assi, as usual more splendidly military than any soldier, coming towards her with his supple stride and clinking spurs. His eyes opened wide at sight of her; he carried her hand in its black lace mitten to his ripe lips; and she accepted his invitation to go to the buffet.

On the way their course was checked by *la Générale Eudes* who with her entourage was making a sort of imperial progress round the room, her silk dress rustling, her diamonds scintillating, the same aloof serenity on her beautiful face that had struck Ludovica when she saw her for the first time in the club in Montmartre. She could not resist saying to her brother, who had found himself next to her in the press created by Madame Eudes' progress, "*Com' e bella!*" "Yes," answered Piero, with his Mephistophelean snigger, "The unravaged loveliness of perfect stupidity!"

Ludovica passed on with Assi into the Arched Gallery, faintly lit, with only a few persons gathered round the buffet or making alcoves for *tête-à-têtes* of the vaulted embrasures which ran along it and gave it its name. One of these was vacant, and into it Assi led her and brought her a glass of champagne. Then he seated himself disagreeably close beside her, and, with his eyes rolling, asked why he never saw her now. She let him indulge in reminiscence of the recent days in which, by his account, they had "fought side by side," at the barricades of Neuilly and the Porte Maillot, hoping that the sense of comradeship thus recalled would incline him to favour her petition, and use his influence to obtain for her the precious pass out of Paris.

But she was quickly undeceived. As soon as she stated her wish, he frowned, turned his eyes lugubriously and a trifle tipsily to the arch overhead, and asked why she desired to desert the Cause and him at the same moment. She could not impart to him her true motive, and nothing she could say softened him.

"You have a husband," he said. "Is he seeking to escape with you?"

"I would not go without him, naturally, Citizen!"

"Husbands are out of date . . . and that one of yours is a menace to the Commune!" He lit a cigar without her permission,

and passed his arm round her waist, murmuring endearments in Italian.

Ludovica tried to rise from the bench, saying proudly, "You forget yourself, *Signor Comandante* . . . you forget what is due to me . . . and you forget what you mentioned a moment ago, that I have a husband."

"To the basket with that husband of yours!" he answered thickly, and tightened his hold on her. Wrenching herself free, she nearly upset him, and left him in an undignified balance with one hand touching the floor.

"And this," she thought flaming, as she hurried out into the Guard-Room, "is the Tuileries!"

"Where are you going?" It was Piero, who crossed her near the head of the staircase.

"Home! Will you take me, Piero?"

He smiled mockingly. "I knew you would have no fortune with that paltry Casanova in epaulettes . . . I fear I have done no better for you with Delescluze."

"At least you tried, then, Piero! I am grateful." Her eyes shone suddenly wet.

He shrugged his shoulders. "I have earned no thanks. Delescluze insisted that your request must be examined by the Committee of Public Safety . . . The old Jacobin would hand his own mother over to interrogation . . . And he would be right!"

She sighed. "I thank you all the same, Piero," she said. "Will you take me home then? It is no pleasure to me to stay here any longer."

"I will take you to a *fiacre*. Then I must return."

Re-entering the Arched Gallery after seeing Ludovica off, Piero found Assi sulkily drinking by the buffet. He could not resist some malicious enquiries how the Commandant was enjoying the party. Assi made snarling replies, and presently flung down the end of his lighted cigar, as was his wont, upon the carpet. Piero promptly set his foot on it. "*Garde à vous, Commandant!*" he warned him. "None of those tricks here, or you, I, our colleagues in the salon opposite, and *la belle Générale Eudes* will all go flying skywards!"

"What do you mean?"

"Simply that all the rooms under our feet are stacked with explosives—barrels of gunpowder, shells and other munitions; to which

by my orders have been added gallons of petrol in cans, firewood, and other precautions against a certain eventuality."

"The devil! Who are you to give such orders? I am Delegate to the Arsenal!"

"And I," rapped Piero, "am Delegate from the Committee of Safety . . . for the care of public buildings. If it interests you to know, the Louvre, the Ministry of Finances, the Hôtel de Ville, the Palais-Royal . . . all the chief official buildings, in short, on both sides of the river are in the same interesting condition . . . at my suggestion and by my labours. Thiers may take Paris, but the Commune shall leave its monument."

Assi stared at him a moment; then, "You are raving!" he growled. "Thiers will never take Paris!"

He lurched over the floor through the Guard-Room and into the big salon. Standing just inside the doorway he saw the dwarf Ferré, his eye-glass ribbon drooping, his coat-skirts about his ankles, his chalky face expressionless as he watched the dancing that had just begun.

At sight of Raoul Rigault's *âme damnée* Assi paused, and a glimmer came into his tipsy eyes. He lit a fresh cigar, collected himself, and approached Ferré. "*Bonsoir, Citoyen!*" he said. "Do you by chance know a certain Captain Caprano on Montmartre?"

Ferré turned his head as sharply as a mechanical figure, but there was no change of expression on his face. "Evidently!" he squeaked. "I was of the former Committee of Vigilance for Montmartre; I have not lost interest in the district. What now about this man?"

"There is a plot to procure his escape from Paris."

Ferré clicked his head back, and seemed to watch the dancers for a few minutes. There was no sign of interest, however, in his inky eyes. Assi, thinking he would never speak again, was about to leave him, when he said in his bodiless tone, "Then I must act at once."

"Act? How?" Assi paused.

"I had him watched last month . . . but I could get no ground against him, and he is popular with the Guardsmen there, whom he used to command. They would not arrest him if called upon . . . But a day or two ago we intercepted a messenger from Versailles—Paris swarms with them, whatever we try to do—carrying a note to be delivered to Captain Caprano from a certain General Sertignes

de Messimy, who holds a post, it seems, in Thiers's army. In his letter this General Sertigues recalls Caprano's services in the Imperial Guard, and begs him to make his way to Versailles and join his Staff . . . Evidently they are short of officers there."

"*Eh bien?*"

Ferré sank again into a long silence. Then, "If this man," he squeaked, "is so valuable to them, he is valuable to us . . . evidently. He should be added to the hostages in la Roquette without delay. . . . Come with me and find Citizen Rigault."

They found Citizen Rigault near the buffet, wrapped in his four coats in spite of the summer weather, sitting with a magnum of champagne on a little table before him and his arm round a blowsy blonde, dressed in the clothes of a Duchess, but revealing by the way her train was huddled round her knees and the blockish manner in which her silk-stockinged legs were planted that she was in reality a market-woman from the Halles. The Public Prosecutor was in high spirits, his fugacious eyes darting behind his glasses, his fierce hedge of beard quivering with laughter, while he tried to entertain his companion by drawing a picture puzzle with a salacious key to it on a slip of paper he had just taken from a swollen pocket-book. Ferré requested a word apart with him, and he rose still chuckling, finished his glass and wiped his beard with an expensive bandanna handkerchief.

"Don't be long, *mon petit choux!*" said the blonde in a hoarse voice.

"Not long!" laughed Rigault, and listened to Ferré's story.

"Good! good!" he said, "a Bonapartist Captain, eh? *Nous allons le flanquer là-dedans!* He can confess to the Archbishop in la Roquette," he chuckled again. "Now," he felt in his pockets, and looked round. "Ah! this will do. *Pardon, ma belle!*" He recovered the paper with the puzzle, over which the market-girl was pondering with her red elbows upon the marble-topped table, and on the other side wrote and signed the warrant for the arrest of Captain Caprano. "Get this stamped at the Committee, Ferré," he hiccuped, "and good luck to you!" He slapped the dwarf on his irresponsible back and returned to his dalliance.

"Now we have him," said Ferré to Assi, "evidently!"

The grey of the May morning was turning to blue overhead as the last of the Communist revellers left the Tuileries, yawning.

FLAMES

(1)

TOWARDS midnight on the following day, Monday, May 22nd, Deodato went to the bay-window of his studio, overlooking the north, and peered out. The stillness was amazing. It was hardly possible to believe, as he scanned the regular lines of street-lighting, that since yesterday afternoon all the western part of Paris had fallen into the hands of the army of Versailles.

At nightfall the firing had died away. Mac-Mahon, wary of the traps of street-fighting, meant to see where he was going at every step, to advance at his own time, making secure of every movement, upon the centre of the city now ringed round with the barricades of the Commune *in extremis*. He could probably have rushed Montmartre this Monday, but he preferred to order his Generals to pause on its western side, on the edge of the cemetery, in Clichy and in Batignolles, and to defer the escalade of the Butte till daylight should come again to their assistance.

And Deodato, gazing anxiously out into the dark, wondered for the hundredth time during his lonely evening, for Benedetta had been in bed some hours, whether Ludovica would get through to the north in the morning; whether the plan they had at last agreed upon was wisdom or rashness. He had had the inspiration on Sunday to seek assistance for his wife, in virtue of his partly English blood, from the British Embassy. The Ambassador had long since disappeared, and he found only a minor official behind locked doors. This clerk advised him to seek help from Mr. Washburne, the American Minister, who had remained at his post through siege and insurrection to give what aid he could to his nationals and other innocent sufferers from the upheaval. Washburne was engaged, but Deodato found a sympathetic hearer in a fair-haired young attaché of the Embassy, Mr. Lexington, whose romanticism

was touched by Ludovica's story, and who declared himself ready, if his chief would close his eyes to it, to risk a plot.

Arrangements had been made for him on Tuesday morning, he explained, to escort a small party of American citizens, together with the wife of one of his colleagues and her maid, out of the city through the German lines at Saint-Denis. Mrs. Skinner, if she were told of Ludovica's plight, would surely allow of her being substituted for the maid, and no one would interfere with a party travelling under the ægis of the American Minister. The news of the advance of the Versailles troops as far as the Arc de Triomphe, which came while they were discussing the plan, caused alarm in the Embassy, and Mr. Lexington urged Deodato to bring his wife at once to shelter there, so that she could be ready to start whenever the opportunity offered.

Deodato had taken leave of Ludovica in the bleak discomfort of an ante-room in the Embassy, late on the Sunday night, reassuring her on his account by the confident assertion that the city must within a day or two be occupied by the Versaillese, who reckoned him their friend. He had only to lie quiet in the Château des Zéphirs—if necessary taking shelter in the cellar—until the struggle was over; and then he would find no difficulty in leaving Paris to join her, as they had planned, in England.

But still Ludovica looked agonised. She ran after him, when at last he had taken up his hat to go, and clung to him, sobbing and kissing him with such a passion that his knees trembled, and for a minute he thought he simply could not leave her. She was softly stroking his disabled arm, murmuring, "How can I leave you, my darling, my husband, my all, when you are so weak and ill and cannot help yourself?"

Then he remembered the child, and courage returned to him. He must not be betrayed by emotion into spoiling the one plan that could preserve her from her growing peril. If until this afternoon she had been the prisoner of the Commune, a worse danger threatened her now that the city seemed about to fall into the hands of M. Thiers. There was little reason to suppose that the victors would show clemency to a female Communard almost as notorious as Louise Michel herself . . . Deodato almost cried aloud as the vision of what might happen if she fell into their hands came to him. For the last time he twisted her hair in his fingers as he gently drew her head towards him with his left hand. For the

last time he let his lips cling to the small, red mouth ; then, seizing his hat again, he almost ran from the room without looking back.

All this Monday he had passed in restless suspense between his house and garden, listening to the artillery and musketry, and watching the clouds of smoke that rose over the western quarters of the city. His Italian lucidity, however, kept telling him that he had done the best for her by placing her under neutral protection ; and he recalled, too, that the face of the attaché, Mr. Lexington, was one to inspire confidence. These reflections calmed his nerves. "*Allons !*" he told himself. "She will be out of Paris at dawn . . . if she has not gone already !" But he could not sleep all the same, and sat down to distract himself with a lump of clay.

While the night hours thus crawled by for Deodato in the silence and solitude of his villa, at the Château Rouge in the Chaussée de Clignancourt under the Butte, the Committee for the defence of Montmartre sat *en permanence*. The old dancing-hall had been turned into a military post ; the ante-rooms, the corridors, and the garden in front of it were filled with armed guards, with the clatter of rifles laid down and taken up, and the hubbub of discussion and recrimination over the day's unlucky fighting. The Committee Room itself presented the usual spectacle—clouds of cigar-smoke wreathing aimlessly round the candles on the table and mantelpiece and the single flaring gas-globe overhead ; disordered papers littering the green baize ; scraps of greasy food, wine glasses and beer mugs drained to their stagnant dregs ; a *képi* and sabre slung from a bracket by the fireplace.

One member of the Committee snored on a sofa ; the others drooped and leaned round the table, two sleeping with their heads pillowed on their arms, others arguing together in dispirited, hoarse voices, Clément, the poetic *raté*, smoking in a vindictive silence, Dereure, the President, looking up with glowering annoyance at the chatterers while he laboured to draw up a report. On the hearth-rug stood *le Manchot*, rocking up and down mechanically on his heels, his eyes glassy slits under sunken lids, his face looking as though it had been sprinkled with ashes. His return to his place on this Montmartre Committee had surprised his colleagues, who knew he had a more important post as Delegate from the Committee of Public Safety. "My work is finished," he had curtly

answered their curiosity. "They know down there what they have to do when the time comes. *D'ailleurs, tout est perdu!* I may as well pay you the compliment of dying with you."

There had been an angry growl at his defeatism, and he had scarcely spoken again during the prolonged sitting . . . Through the doors the scraping of feet, the rattling of weapons and clamour of voices in the passages penetrated into the stuffy room, causing Dereure to look up again from his writing with a malignant air.

Abruptly the doors were pushed open, and there entered a fat Lieutenant of the Federals, a red sash across his belly, and his jowl and hands suggesting the butcher which by trade he was.

"*Bonsoir, Citoyens!*" He touched his *képi* clumsily. "Instructions from the Committee of Public Safety!" He flung a little sheaf of papers down on the table in front of the presidential chair.

"Order, Citizens!" Dereure rapped on the baize with a mallet. "I beg you to attend to the business of the Committee." The members yawned, stretched, and with the exception of the sleeper on the sofa, who on waking merely turned over so as to be able to watch the proceedings from where he lay, sat up to pay attention.

Dereure looked through the papers presented by the burly officer. "We have here," he announced, "warrants from Citizen Rigault, Public Prosecutor, and from Citizen Ferré, of the *Sûreté*, requiring us to deliver certain suspect persons resident in this Arrondissement to be conducted as hostages to the Prison of la Roquette."

"The names!" demanded the chinless poet Clément, with a flicker of interest in his wearied eyes.

Dereure scrutinised the warrants again, and sorted them. "In the first place," he said, laying his hand on a pile he had separated, "the brigadier and four men of the Gendarmerie—whom the Committee has detained in custody here at the Château Rouge since the affair of March 18th, awaiting instructions from the judiciary authorities."

"Can be spared!" grunted Clément, and the other members growled agreement.

"Then," pursued Dereure, "the two *vicaires* of the Church of Saint-Pierre de Montmartre, to be arrested immediately and removed with the others."

"Good riddance," sniggered Clément; "should have been done long ago!"

"Lastly"—Dereure raised the fiery beads of his eyes to Piero, who was still standing on the hearthrug—"this concerns you, Citizen Sambellini, perhaps . . . the person called Captain Caprano, resident at the Château des Zéphirs, *ci-devant* officer of the Imperial Guard."

Piero did not move.

"What is the charge against Caprano?" asked another Committee-man.

"It is not stated here," answered the President; "but I can tell you. He is suspected of correspondence with a General in the Army of Versailles, with a view to escaping from Paris and resuming his rank in their forces."

"*Au mur!*" said Clément, brutally.

"What do you say, Citizen Sambellini?" asked Dereure again, curiously. "It is your brother-in-law, is it not?"

Piero turned his head sharply to the officer. "Why do you bring these affairs to us?" he demanded. "The Public Prosecutor and the Committee of Public Safety have power, have they not, to order what arrests and perquisitions they will in any region of Paris? It is no affair of this Committee."

The butcher scratched his *képi* up on his head. "*Dame!*" he explained. "They require your counter-signature, Citizens."

"Why?" asked Dereure.

"To prevent a demonstration. The priests, perhaps, *le nommé Caprano* certainly, have friends in the quarter . . . They tell me he was for a time officer in the National Guard of this Arrondissement, and that he made himself popular with his men."

"We want no demagogues here!" said Clément, in a shocked tone.

"Citizen Ferré," pursued the butcher, "fears there might, perhaps, be some attempt to rescue *le nommé Caprano* if we cannot show a warrant signed by the authorities for Montmartre . . . *Dame!* This is no moment to be fighting among ourselves!"

"It is all you have been doing this past two months!" said Piero, and sank again into reverie.

"It may be so or not," commented the President, leaving it uncertain if he was answering Citizen Sambellini's taunt or the Lieutenant's fears. "In any case, you shall have the warrant." He drew a sheet of paper towards him and began to write. "Do not leave the room, Citizens, any of you!" he said sharply, looking up. "I shall require all your signatures to this!"

"Safety in numbers!" giggled the man on the sofa, a lanky loose-jointed fellow, with a face like a Pierrot's, disfigured by a crumpled mouth. He had already failed as a painter and as a restaurateur. "If there is a bill sent in—you mean we shall all pay our share of the reckoning!"

Dereure disregarded him, and pushed the sheet along the table for all to sign. There was a scratching of pens in silence. Then he rose and took it himself to the man on the sofa, with a quill. "Your name, too!" he said.

The Pierrot grimaced, but scrawled a purposely illegible signature at the foot of the others . . . To-morrow, you never knew, the Versailles might be masters, and there would be an inquiry into what had been done to hostages. He pushed back the untidy black lock that fell in a point over his forehead, and tossed himself on to his back on the sofa again.

The President returned to his chair. "We only want yours now, Citizen Sambellini!" he said.

Piero shivered, and seemed to return from a long journey. "What is the sense of this?" he broke out, pointing to the warrant. "I have never shrunk from sweeping an enemy of the Revolution from my path—when he was dangerous." He held out his artificial hand. "I did not earn my name, *le Manchot*, by shrinking from bloodshed . . . or peril. And I would not spare my brother-in-law . . . or my sister . . . or my wife if I had one . . . now . . . if what is dead could be revived by the deed. But all this is useless that you are doing. The Commune lies in ruin . . . through the folly, the cowardice of its leaders . . . Yes, I *will* speak," he raised his voice above threatening protests. "You have shown me the Commune was a cause not worth dying for . . . and why should I kill any more for it? These imbecile old priests, my dilettante brother-in-law . . . Mice who may be allowed to go on nibbling their share of the bourgeois meal-sack, as they have always done . . . That is my opinion."

"*Chouette!*" exclaimed the paunchy Lieutenant, with an ugly display of broken teeth. "A fine friend of the people, this one!"

"You are not of the Committee! Hold your tongue!" retorted Piero.

"Citizen Sambellini!" Dereure fixed his glittering beads upon him. "Think again!"

"You may," blustered the truculent poet, "find *your* name added to the list otherwise!"

"By all means, Citizens!" answered Piero, with icy politeness. "Finish by shooting the man who was worked harder, dared more for you than any other member of the Commune! It will be quite in keeping. Your reputation only needs that too!"

"Oh no!" said the President, "nothing so easy as that! You talk of reputation, Sambellini. If you refuse to sign, I will see to it that by dawn Montmartre is placarded with the news that you have sold the people for a pardon from Versailles . . . You are welcome to live . . . and live that down if you can!"

Piero took such a threatening step towards the table that Dereure pushed back his chair and half-rose. Piero had seized a heavy candle-stick as if he meant to assault the President. Then he put it down again. "Give me the paper!" he said in a suffocated voice, and bending over it affixed his signature. Then he turned his back upon the Committee and leant his elbow on the mantel-piece.

Dereure gave a cold smile, and handed the warrant to the officer. "I will execute this at once!" said the butcher.

"Better wait a while!" suggested Clément. "The streets are still filled with our Guardsmen. Who knows? You might stir an *échauffourée*. Wait till the small hours! Between two and three it will be quiet on the Butte . . . and light enough to see your way to take him quickly down some stairway."

"I cannot wait here all night!" objected the butcher.

"Haven't you a Sergeant?" asked Dereure. "Leave him to it . . . Take the priests yourself now, and go!"

"You don't help me much!" grumbled the butcher. "Can't you lend me some of your men?"

"Haven't we told you, you fool," said Piero in a calm voice, still with his back to the gathering, "that the Guards of Montmartre will not assist in this affair?"

"He speaks well," assented Clément with an approving glance at Piero. "Better do what we advise, Lieutenant!"

"Very good," said the butcher, "I will tell my Sergeant. *Bonsoir, la compagnie!*" He tramped to the door, and turned back. "Good luck for to-morrow, Citizens!" he leered. "It will be hot in Montmartre, I am thinking!"

Dereure stood up. "The Committee stands adjourned," he

announced. "But do not any of you leave the Château Rouge. I may need to convoke you at any moment. I advise you get some sleep where you can and as you can, inside the building."

The Committee rose with a shuffle of feet, and streamed out of the room.

"Lower the gas one of you!" cried the fellow on the sofa. Somebody obliged him, and he was about to turn over and resume his slumbers when he saw Sambellini still standing, a shadowy form, by the mantelpiece, peering at his reflection in the glass by the light of a candle.

The man looked at him curiously. "You seemed ready . . . for a moment . . . to take a big risk for your brother-in-law," he observed. "I thought you would be for the wall, with him. You must love one another well!"

"I hate my brother-in-law," said Piero. "Almost as much as I do my colleagues! Now are you satisfied?"

"*Toqué*, Citizen Sambellini, *toqué*!" declared the Pierrot, tapping his forehead with a crooked finger. "Well," he gaped. "Don't you want to sleep? . . . As that fellow said, it will be warm work to-morrow!"

"I am not interested in to-morrow." Piero moved the candle closer, as though to see his face better in the glass.

"You admire your beauty, then?" enquired the other sardonically, watching him.

"There are many of you," retorted Piero, "who by to-morrow night may be glad to remember what they used to look like."

"Bah!" The tired man punched the hard sofa-cushion, and nestled down to get to sleep. He was just dropping off, when a draught of night-air pierced him, and he sat up indignant to find Citizen Sambellini gone and the door open. He jerked himself off the couch like a marionette, and slammed it to.

"*F . . . d'un f . . . !*" he swore. "They seem to think a man can live without sleep at all!" . . . It was nearly two o'clock.

(2)

At about six the party from the American Embassy, under the charge of Mr. Lexington, arrived at the station on the *enceinte* near the Porte de la Chapelle Saint-Denis where they had learnt that the train would start at seven; for nothing was coming further into

Paris than the ramparts, since the Terminus du Nord was expected to be the scene of fighting during the day. They had made an uneventful journey to the tiny outlying station in a couple of carriages, for Mr. Lexington the night before had obtained a pass from the invading troops, and they had crossed their line and driven straight down the Champs-Élysées, and thence along the military boulevards, far behind the battle-front that was being formed at dawn.

All this western quarter of Paris was as still as death, shuttered and deserted. The only movement in the streets was that of the red-breeched columns moving in from the Gates to take part in the assault against the centre and east of the city; the only sound besides their tramping feet was the rumble of the artillery accompanying them. Ludovica turned her head and pulled down the veil over her hat so as not to see the uniforms she still detested with a feminine fury.

At the station, while they waited about in groups for the train, her restlessness led her out into the approach, flanked by the engine sheds and goods-yards of the Chemin du Fer du Nord. The sky was already bright overhead, and it was not long before with a jump of her heart she heard the first thunder of the guns assaulting Batignolles and the Cemetery of Montmartre. She had almost resolved to run back into the station and bury herself somewhere where she would not hear the hateful noise—the noise that knelled her hopes and told her Deodato was in danger—when she was suddenly arrested by another sound. It was that of horse-hoofs trotting briskly and from time to time breaking into a canter. Soon the whirl of wheels became audible too, and into the space before the station there drove at the best speed of its thin nag a *fiacre* with a white-hatted coachman on the box. Its only occupant was an old woman, bare-headed, and as she tumbled out almost before the horse stopped, Ludovica with eyes opening in utter amazement recognised—Benedetta!

The ancient servant tottered towards her, exclaiming and crying and clasping her hands.

"What is it? What is the matter?" cried Ludovica. "How come you here, Benedetta?"

"Oh! Signorina, blessed Signorina! Blessings on the saints that I am not too late to find you! . . . The Signore . . . *Il Signor Capitano*! . . . They have taken him!"

"What do you say?" Ludovica's heart seemed to be stopped by a cruel hand. "Taken him? When? . . . Who?"

"But the soldiers, my dove! . . . Ah! *Dio mio* . . . what an outrage!"

"The red pantaloons! They cannot have captured Montmartre so soon!"

"No, no, the others . . . the *canaglia*. . . Signor Piero's friends and yours . . . the Guards in blue!"

"What should the Commune arrest him for?"

"How can I tell you that? They came before it was light. . . . I sleep sound, you know, Signorina. . . . I did not wake until I heard the cries and struggle . . . struggle," she made desperate pantomime, "in the hall. . . . There was a crowd of them, forcing him down the steps out of the front-door. *Poverello!* What could he do with his arm in a sling? . . . I cried to him, but his back was turned: he could not see me; and they pulled him along. Then one . . . Ah! *Madonna mia!* I tremble at it still . . . pointed his gun at me. 'Make a sound, and you are dead!' . . . And I fell on the stairs, covering my eyes . . . and when I looked up they were gone . . . leaving the door open. . . . And I thought, 'What shall I do? . . . What shall I do?' And then I said to myself, 'I must find the Signorina if she has not yet left Paris!' The Signore had told me you were to start from this place . . . miles out of the world! . . . How to come to it? I could not think. But I dressed and ran down Rue Marcadet, and I found this good man who has brought me . . . and I have no money to pay him . . . but what is to be done for the poor Signore?"

"I must go back; tell the driver to wait!" Ludovica turned round and saw Mr. Lexington approaching. . . . "Any trouble, Madame Caprano?" he asked.

Ludovica rapidly informed him. He looked grave, but begged her not to think of driving back into Paris in hopes of helping her husband. "You cannot possibly get through," he said. "Listen to the guns! It is a regular battle by now all round the Montmartre district!"

The other members of the party had come timidly out of the station, and were listening also to the distant uproar. "You will be shot most probably," continued Mr. Lexington, "trying to pass between the firing lines . . . street-fighting, the most deadly and dangerous of all for a non-combatant! If not, you will be arrested

a dozen times by both sides, and be no nearer your aim. Be brave . . . be wise, Madame! Leave me to do my best for your husband when I return from Saint-Denis. I pledge my word I will leave no stone unturned to rescue him. . . ."

Ludovica swept his arguments aside. "I thank you, but I must not listen to you, Signor Lexington. I, and I alone, can rescue him from the Commune. They will listen to me . . . they shall listen to me . . . I have earned it—don't you understand?"

"*Notre Dame des Barricades*," murmured Lexington, regarding her with a certain awe. "I know what you mean . . . but I don't think I ought to allow you——"

She interrupted him. "Signor Lexington! Do this one thing for me, I pray you!" She threw her arm over Benedetta's shoulder and drew her towards herself. "Let my old friend here have my place . . . take her with you into safety at Saint-Denis, and I will be ever, ever thankful!"

"Leave you, Signorina!" screamed Benedetta hysterically through her sobs. "No! No! That I will never do! I will die with you rather! I will not go with this Signore!"

"You will do as you are told!" Ludovica turned on her with flaming eyes, terrible in her resolution. "Do you hear? Be quiet!" She slapped her. "Do as I tell you, Benedetta!" Generations of servitude asserted themselves. Benedetta choked, whimpered, and said in a small voice, "I will do as the Signorina wills!"

"That is right! Good-bye, *Benedetta mia*, my dear, my darling, good-bye . . . thank you—for everything!" She fondled the old servant for a moment, while the tears ran out of her eyes on to the grey head. Then brushing them away with her glove, she crossed to the cab-driver. "Take me back to Montmartre!" she commanded.

The coachman sprang up on his box, waving his whip and his arms. "*Qu'est que vous me chantez-là? . . . What next? . . . Am I to get my head bashed for you . . . hein, la bourgeoisie? Pay me . . . thirty francs, I demand . . . and let me go!*"

Ludovica seated herself in the carriage. "Drive on!" she said. "Drive back as far as the Boulevard Ornano, at least . . . and you shall have three napoleons. . . . Otherwise nothing! . . . I tell you, *drive on!*"

The man took one look at her face and collapsed sulkily on the box. Then he gave the horse a savage slash and started.

"What's the matter, Mr. Lexington?" enquired Mrs. Skinner, approaching the young man, who stood listening to the lame *cloppety-clop* of the hoofs as it diminished. "Why has that foolish young woman gone back again, after all your trouble? . . . Why, you're never crying, Mr. Lexington? . . . Do tell, now!"

(3)

The driver of the *fiacre* refused with a wealth of imagery to go further than the point of junction between the Rue Marcadet and the Boulevard Ornano. Indeed by the time they reached it the noise of musketry and the more distant boom of field-guns was menacing enough to justify his terrors. Ludovica hesitated a moment, and then, seeing down the Boulevard Ornano ahead red-breeched skirmishers darting and slinking across the strips of shadow on the sunlit roadway, she realised that the cab could go no further. She paid the man off; and as he whipped round and lashed his wearied horse to a last clatter of hoofs in the effort to escape from the danger zone, she threw herself into an alley on the right, hoping to be able to make her way, through the nest of mean streets clothing the lower slopes of the Butte at its north-east corner, up to the villa. She heard firing on all sides as she hurried on, and once passed the form of a Federal Guard in the gutter, for whom after a quick examination she realised she could do nothing.

Then, turning a corner, she came upon a rude barricade of furniture, mattresses and a little overturned hand-cart, defended by a group of half-dressed Guards and one or two women with rifles. They threatened her as she advanced, pointing their guns; but she walked boldly forward with her hands over her head, and cried her name to them as she drew near. Immediately they came crowding to the improvised parapet, gazing at her in awe and admiration.

"But what are you doing in this finery, Citizeness?" demanded the sentry who had first challenged her, looking at her clothes. "You might have been any bourgeoisie . . . and though I don't shoot women, like the Versaillese, my trigger might have gone off of its own accord!" He laughed hoarsely.

"Yes," assented one of the women. "The friend of the people should dress like the people!"

"Let me pass, Citizens!" pleaded Ludovica. "It is a matter of life and death for me, I assure you!"

The sentry held out his hand. "Climb up, *Notre Dame des Barricades*!" he said, helping her over the obstruction of tables and barrels. "Go home for your uniform, and return to fight at our side!"

Ludovica thanked them, and ran panting up a staircase nearby which opened on the deserted Rue Saint-Denis. The noise of the battle receded below her, but on the other hand it seemed to be spreading out, and she realised that the citadel of the Commune was being attacked from three sides. Arrived at the back of the Château des Zéphirs, she determined out of caution to let herself in with her keys at the little door leading up by steps to the studio out of the abandoned sand-pit in the slope of the hill. She found to her surprise that the door in the wall was open, and, when she had climbed the steps, that the glass-door issuing from the studio was unlocked. In the studio all was still and undisturbed. She stood listening to the thud of her heart, but there was no sound to answer it in the little villa filled with joyous sunshine. Apprehensively she pushed open the door from the studio into the salon, and then tip-toed across to the front-hall.

Here there had been a struggle. The hat-stand was overturned, and a statuette that stood on a bracket had been smashed to pieces on the oil-cloth of the floor. The front-door, too, stood open, and the gravel on the path was churned by footsteps.

What was she to do? Seek the Committee! . . . They must be *en permanence* somewhere, directing the defence! From them she must procure Deodato's release! That was evidently the course—yes, but not in these clothes! She would take the hint dropped at the barricade she had passed. No favour would be granted to the woman who looked like a bourgeoisie in a rose-trimmed hat and a bustled skirt. She raced up to the bedroom, and dragged open the drawer into which she had, before leaving, crammed her uniform. In a few minutes, hat, veil, bodice and skirts lay in a heap on the floor, and she was dragging her long boots on over the blue pantaloons of the Federal Guard. Stamping her feet down into them, she released her locks to fall upon her shoulders; she must show these men the very figure that had rallied the defenders of the western barricades for so many days—to appeal to their emotions thus was the only hope of wringing a pardon for Deodato from them . . . if it was not too late already, if it was not too late!

She ran out of the Château by the front-gate, and turned to the

right to reach the Place du Tertre by the side of the Church. Perhaps someone there could tell her where the Committee might be found. But on reaching the little square she found herself enveloped in a flood of Federals retiring in disorder from the Rue Lepic, up which a violent fusillade was echoing. She was borne back in a group of them against the wall of a house on the east side of the square; a door opened, and they crowded together into a passage, slammed and bolted the door, and then dashed into the adjoining rooms to fire from the windows.

The Place du Tertre lay empty in the glare, but puffs of smoke and shots from its opposite side showed that the enemy had reached the top of Rue Lepic, though they were too prudent to show themselves. A combat of musketry ensued from windows, roofs and street-corners, where the Federals had taken cover and rallied, a combat which seemed to do no execution except upon tiles and walls, where the bullets pinged and struck, bringing down jets of plaster.

Ludovica made her way into the front room of the house, which she thought she had seen an officer enter. It was a speckless middle-class sitting-room with green plush chairs of walnut-wood, and canaries singing excitedly in a gilt cage over an alcove. The officer was there, with a handful of men kneeling and firing over the window-ledge, while one, badly wounded, lay up against the wall, drawing rattling breaths and staining the flowered paper with his blood. As soon as she approached, "A woman?" exclaimed the officer. "Take cover!" and almost knocked her down on to the floor beside his men, who raised themselves cautiously one by one to fire from the window, and ducked again.

"Here!" he said roughly. "Make yourself useful, at any rate! Crawl over and get that fellow's rifle, and post yourself at the corner of the window there. . . . Shoot at anything you see! . . . You can fire a rifle, can't you?"

Ludovica shook her head in refusal, but managed to creep over to the wounded man and give him a drink from his pannikin. She found he was too badly wounded to be helped, even if she had had any means to do so. The officer then seemed to forget her in the heat of the combat, which increased in violence as the fire of the Versailles opposite was fed by reinforcements. The room grew thicker with smoke, and through its wreaths she saw two more men collapse, while bullets from outside pierced the pictures on the

walls and splintered the furniture. She tried to drag the wounded out of the line of fire and do anything she could for them, and as the hours passed in the racket felt her senses reeling with the agony of her impotence. Where was Deodato? How could she possibly come to him? What were they doing to him?

It was already afternoon when the door from the passage opened, and a man in a red scarf looked round it and hurriedly withdrew again. But Ludovica had caught a glimpse of him, and knew what the badge of office meant. She rose, defying the bullets, and ran through the door after him. She caught him in the passage, babbling to the women of the house. It was the Committee-man with the crumpled, Pierrotesque face. She seized his scarf and poured out her inquiries about Deodato. He looked dazed for a moment, then uttered a spirituous hiccup that might be fear or malice.

"*Dame!*" he stuttered; "I advise you to give up your husband, Citizeness, and think of yourself. . . . He is shot by now!"

"Shot!" screamed Ludovica. "Where?"

He leered at her, with shaking hands. "Your husband is a traitor! He was arrested last night by Guards from the Committee of Public Safety, to join the other hostages at la Roquette. But his friends the enemy arrived before they could get him away. So they sent us a message an hour ago from the Tour Solférino to know what they should do. And we . . . I mean to say, those who were present of the Committee . . . I was out of the room . . . sent back an order for all hostages to be shot at once . . . in the quarry below the Tour Solférino! It is done by now, for sure!"

With a dreadful cry Ludovica released him, and dashed for the end of the passage, where she saw a back-door leading to the garden. The women plucked at her sleeves to restrain her, but she pulled back the bolt, and ran through the narrow strip of garden out of a gate opening on to the bare crest of the Butte.

It was still crowded with cannon, rusting guns that the defence had lacked the energy or organisation to make use of, and through these she threaded her way, careless of the bullets coming over the crest from the south, where the Versaillaise were attacking the grass-grown slopes from the Place Saint-Pierre. Artillery were firing, too, and a shell burst some way ahead of her, knocking some cannon into wreckage, but did not harm her. She ran despairingly towards the walls of the Pleasure-Garden and the striped tower; then

suddenly saw the tricolour flag run up and unfurl itself on the summit. . . . They were there, too !

She swung away, and dipping under the crest, rounded the corner of the garden-wall, and ran along a narrow lane, with the bank and wall on one side, and on the other a row of squalid little houses, with untidy garden-patches in front, and the declivity falling precipitously away behind them. It ended in a flight of stairs, at the foot of which was the disused quarry that gaped underneath the eastern enclosures of the Garden. Here she was out of range of fire ; the houses below were in shuttered silence, as if holding their breath . . . and here she saw that her quest was ended.

Under the high, white wall of the quarry, topped by the trees of the Pleasure-Garden, a line of bodies lay in various attitudes of relaxation or contortion. It displayed the black cassocks and white bands of the two priests, the braiding of the Gendarmes' uniforms, and . . . the only sight that Ludovica's starting eyes could see . . . the figure of Deodato in his silk blouse, fallen forward upon his face, his bandaged arm in its sling twisted underneath him, his velvet beret still crammed down upon his head. All Ludovica's strength forsook her at the spectacle. Her knees gave way ; she sank forward on her hands ; and a blinding rain of tears washed the whole scene from her eyes. . . . Too late ! Too late ! Such breathless efforts . . . such cruel delays . . . the vain donning of her Communist uniform . . . too late . . . too late ! Why had she ever left him . . . faithless and selfish that she was ? She could have saved him last night, *Notre Dame des Barricades* . . . but not this morning. . . . Her husband, her lover, the father of the child she was beginning to bear . . . lost . . . lost . . . gone for ever from her . . . gone !

Unable to stir, she lay there shaken by sobs that convulsed her frame from her hands clutching at the debris of the quarry to her quivering feet. The sound of her weeping went up in the strange silence of the little semi-circular slaughter-ground, while all around the noise of the conflict continued to rage over Paris ; while the Butte overhead, and the streets winding up to it, and the ancient village of Montmartre behind, still rang with rifle-fire and shrieks and savage cheers. No one came near her, and she heard nothing in the black despair of her soul.

She did not know how long her paroxysm lasted . . . she might have been unconscious part of the time. When at last it left her

weak, cold, and drained of tears, shadow had fallen over the staring wall of death confronting her. The sun was turning slowly towards its western bed, as if tired of the sight of a whole city given over to civil carnage, and cast no rays, as it disappeared behind the hill, into this little pit on the farther side. A ghastly grey began to steal over the motionless bodies in their rigid or huddled attitudes. Ludovica, gazing at them distraught, was seized by the hope that she might find some concealed weapon on one of them with which to despatch herself upon her husband's corpse, and so pass away at least with her chilled lips on his colder ones.

She was staring at his form, trying to call up strength enough to crawl to his side, when she suddenly stiffened. She was staring through her short-sighted eyes at his bandaged arm, with her mouth open, as though she were gazing at his spirit rising from his remains. . . . It could not be . . . it could not be . . . she was surely losing her sanity! She crouched again, peering strainedly forward, and then wriggled towards him in little jerks, her breath coming in pants. . . . It was so . . . it was so . . . there could be no mistake! The arm Deodato carried in a sling was his *right* one. The corpse had its *left* arm bound up and the right flung forward, the fingers curved into a claw as they had clutched the air when the bullets struck. It was not Deodato—who could it be then?

Her crawl ended in two or three pantherish bounds. She clutched the body, turned it over, and raised the head in her hands close to her eyes. A shriek of shock, relief and agony in one went up and came back like scoffing laughter from the quarry-brow. . . . She was gazing into the face and staring eyes of her brother! It was Piero, with his beard roughly clipped off . . . Piero in Deodato's blouse and beret . . . God alone knew how or why! . . . But it was Piero . . . not her husband . . . her beloved little brother . . . not the man who was all her life to-day!

She sat, as the twilight gathered, with her brother's head on her knees, trying to knit things together, to understand. By some means Piero had contrived to substitute himself for her husband, to take his place, and face the firing-party of Guards from another quarter of Paris who did not know Deodato. From friendship? But she knew too well Piero had always hated, jealously hated Deodato! . . . He would have hated any man who wooed and won her. . . . From gratitude to the man who had twice assumed *his* clothes to save him from destruction? Piero had always dubbed

gratitude a bourgeois virtue! . . . For her sake? Had he had so much love at the last? A little warmth flickered round her stone-cold heart for an instant, and died out again. . . . She could hardly believe so much, after all these years. . . . Why then? . . . Why then had he done it?

It did not matter why he had done it! The dreadful thing was that on her knees now lay the wayward child she had cherished . . . had never ceased from cherishing . . . had always pitied . . . always believed to have somewhere in his depths a tiny well of genuine compassion for the sufferers of the earth. . . . She would never again see those brown eyes rolling with their queer fanaticism, never watch with pity the nervous rictus of the lips . . . never soothe away the unrest, watch the drawn lines relax as she found him shelter from his self-made enemies. She sat looking vacantly at the shapes of the houses climbing the hill below her, now fading into nocturnal grey, without a light showing or a stir of human life in their terror. From time to time a short, dry sob made her shoulders twitch beneath their blue worsted epaulettes.

Slowly the sun descended in its indifferent golden splendour upon the white city, with its towers and palace-cupolas and gleaming river gurgling between the stately quays. Shots still rang through its streets, the thud of artillery still shook its windows, wisps of battle-smoke mounted between the roofs, and here and there the cloud of a burning building smudged the translucent vault. None of these things dimmed the farewell that the orb on this twenty-third of May took of Napoleon's imperial capital in its still new vesture of marble and of verdure.

Its levelling rays fell blindingly on the windows of a train that was slowly and with many stops making the difficult transit from the station where Ludovica had turned back that morning to Saint-Denis, and fell on the fatigued face of Deodato. He was leaning back against the cushions, exhausted by his day, but with a deep peace in his heart. Ludovica had got safely out of Paris this morning, and by a most unexpected stroke of fortune he was following her in safety this evening!

He had not anticipated any such issue to his difficulties when last night soon after two o'clock he had heard tapping at the glass door at the top of the garden-steps to his studio, and had opened it to

admit Piero Sambellini. At first he had hardly comprehended the motive of Piero's visit. To learn that he was in danger of arrest by the Commune was a shock rather than a surprise, but that Piero should be here to warn him and facilitate his escape was difficult to believe—the more difficult in that his brother-in-law's oblique glances at him were as full of distaste, if not malignity, as ever. Nevertheless Piero had soon contrived in staccato phrases to bring home to Deodato his peril, and, divesting himself of beret and blouse, he had gone upstairs for money and a change of clothing—it had been a spectacle of sinister grotesqueness to see the two one-armed men struggling to get Deodato into his coat and paletot.

"Is Ludovica gone?" Piero had inquired abruptly.

"She got away this morning with the American Embassy party, thank God!"

"Tell her, will you, *fratellino*, that it cost me some pains to restore to her . . . something she seems to need . . . and that therefore she need not brand me to her children . . . and yours"—he gave Deodato an evil glance—"as her brother who was perpetually ungrateful!"

"How could she, brother?" asked Deodato. He laid his hand on Sambellini's sleeve. "Come with me, Piero!" he pleaded. "It will not be much harder for two than one to get away from Paris . . . and left here you will be in double danger. If the National forces win, and they must win, what can save you from their vengeance? If you are known before then by the Commune to have aided my escape, your fate will be as bad. Come with me!"

Piero jerked his head forward, snarling. "I would not be seen with you . . . I would not come with you . . . for a peerage of France from Thiers! Let the Versaillese shoot me; they will have better reason to than they now know! What have I to live for? More endless grey years of waiting, hiding, plotting . . . to see everything betrayed again in the hour of victory by the imbeciles who with every card in their favour have brought down the Commune in ruin? . . . You say my own associates will kill me? I prefer that even to Mac-Mahon's firing-squad! . . . It will brand them with a memory not to be effaced that the return they made to *le Manchot* was to take his life. . . . The Cause will be remembered through me, but Delescluze, Rigault and all that gang will never raise their heads again! . . . I tell you the prospect delights me when nothing else still can!"

"Come!" entreated Deodato for the last time.

"Go!" said Piero between gritted teeth. "Before I change my mind, *Frataccio*! Go," he hesitated, and mumbled shame-facedly, "for Ludovica's sake!"

Deodato had turned and run down the steps. At the garden-gate he had paused and looked round again, to see Piero's black figure in the dimly-lit doorway of the studio, watching and listening.

Then Deodato had hurried on, he hardly knew by what ways, through the northern suburbs of Paris, with some faint hope of reaching the Gates and getting through before daylight. And in the dawn he had been arrested by a cautiously advancing patrol of the Versaillese on the edge of the outmost boulevards, and taken to their officer. And the officer had been . . . Captain Levassier-Verlin, once aide-de-camp to General Sertigues de Messimy, who had been wounded almost by his side at Rezonville, now a *Chef de Bataillon*! As soon as Deodato had revealed his name, the taciturn aristocrat had shaken his hand, said in one breath, "General Sertigues will be well content!" and in another, "I am going to give you a pass, Caprano"; and then gone on his way with his men, leaving Deodato with the talisman that had carried him safe through the red-breeched columns marching to support these skirmishers, and enabled him at last to get away in the train where now he sat. To-morrow he would be with Ludovica in England!

In the trembling between sunset and dusk the train clanked into Saint-Denis station, and an officer in a spiked helmet stumped along the platform with a sombre file of Prussian soldiers, examining every compartment but detaining nobody.

(4)

It was night when Ludovica shivered out of her stupefaction in the quarry, and her eyes fell on her hands. . . . They were streaming with blood! . . . Aghast, she bent forward to peer into her brother's face still pillowed on her knees; the blood was pouring off it too! . . . But it was not possible. . . . it was a hallucination! In terror she looked round, and beheld all the white wall of the quarry at her back a sheet of leaping red! . . . Not blood! . . . Flames! Where were they coming from? She lifted her head, and saw the sky filled with a pinkish-yellowish stain that seemed to be pushing back the

blue velvet of the summer night. . . . An immense fire ! But where ? . . . Below her, the houses stood black and intact, with only one or two tremulous yellow lights in windows. . . . She gazed skywards again. . . . From the south ; it was coming from the south, this dancing light that was making a mock conflagration on Montmartre ! What could it mean ? She must see !

With shaking hands she laid down Piero's head upon the ground, and dragged Deodato's beret over the pale face that seemed to be smiling triumphantly now in the flicker of the reflections. Then she ran fleetly up the stairs, and along the lane under the walls of the Solferino Gardens to a point just below the crest whence the panorama of Paris was open to her.

She stood leaning on a low fragment of wall, with her mouth open in consternation. Paris below her seemed to have been transformed into a chain of volcanos. In a long line following the quays they spouted, gold and crimson, eddying and palpitating, shooting torrents of sparks into the torn blanket of the night, outlining in black with a skeleton grin the windows, rafters and caving cupolas of the Tuileries and the Hôtel de Ville, licking with furious tongues at the towers, waving like a field of red wheat along the crests of the Ministries and the buildings of the Rue de Rivoli, casting a spectral daylight on the adjoining quarters, whose chimneys stood out and whose white walls glimmered in the ghastly falsity of this dawn of destruction. Even the grassy slopes at her feet, running away to the Place de Saint-Pierre below, were visible in detail broken by shadow, as if giant lanterns were being swung over them by spirits sweeping through the air . . . Ludovica could not make out everything, but she saw enough to realise that before her eyes Paris was being destroyed, was crumbling away under a scythe of flame . . . The vengeance of the Commune ! . . . She understood only too well, and cried madly aloud in protest—a protest drowned, fortunately for her, in the blaring of bugles from the alarmed bivouacs of the Versailles troops in the square below . . .

And that sound woke her to her own peril, her own duty ! . . . She must escape if she could . . . Somewhere Deodato must be safe . . . Piero, since he had delivered him from shooting, should surely have seen to that ! Inside Paris, or perhaps already beyond the walls, Deodato was safe . . . and waiting for her ! He knew nothing of her deadly mistake in returning . . . Somehow if it was not too late, she must get away and rejoin him.

Ah! But how? In the garb of the Commune fatally reassumed, and become a Nessus-shirt to her, how could she escape from Montmartre, where the enemy were now in possession? Impossible to traverse the crest to the Château des Zéphirs and get rid of this uniform; she had seen the tricolour hours ago on the Tower of Solferino just above her! From the region of the Place du Tertre she could still hear shots and intermittent volleys . . . fighting still in progress . . . or execution squads already? Either way, death to attempt a passage in that direction! Down below her feet the glow of the conflagration showed the soldiers of the enemy assembling under arms. . . . She could not run down upon the very bayonets of their outposts!

No, she must return the way she had come. Hope sprang up in her again. There seemed to be still a gap on the eastern side between the two pincers that had closed round Montmartre to the north and south—she might still slip through it!

As she turned to run back along the lane under the wall of the Garden, something lightly touched her face, then another . . . another . . . flakes from the sky! She put up her hand, and, bewildered, brushed off shreds of charred paper . . . They were scraps, had she known it, of documents from the public archives and libraries, whose repositories, as they blazed down by the riverside, had shot them high into the sky to float over Paris—the last propaganda leaflets of the Commune!

Ludovica ran like Atalanta along the rutted lane in spite of her heavy boots, and reached the summit of the stair leading down to the eastern quarters. A distant drum thudded, but otherwise all was quiet, as she peered down the descent. Now one bound, one rush, and she might bury herself in that sheltering darkness . . . and be safe!

Her hand was on the railing, her foot lifted, when a piteous voice arrested her. She paused . . . a child . . . children . . . sobbing! She wheeled round—the sound came from the unkempt garden-patch in front of one of the little houses lining the lane.

She ran to the place, and, pushing aside the stems of a bush, beheld in the lurid yellow flicker that played over the spot a small boy and a still tinier girl crouching and sobbing, the boy with a manful attempt at holding back his tears, the girl with an unashamed wail.

"What is it, children?" gasped Ludovica. "What are you doing out here?"

"They have taken away papa . . . they have shot mamma!" sobbed the boy. "They have smashed our home . . . *les p-p-pantalons rouges* . . . We have nowhere to go . . . and Babette is afraid!"

Ludovica raised her arms to the palpitating sky in horror. Then she seized the boy's cold little hand and snatched up the baby-girl into her other arm. "Stop crying!" she whispered. "I will place you somewhere in safety . . . Ah, God! Must they fight against the children too?"

She looked about her. At the further end of the row one house showed a lighted window. She hurried back towards it with her burden, pushed through its garden-strip, and tapped, tapped, relentlessly at the window-pane. After an age, it seemed, she heard the sash being cautiously lifted, and stooping saw half of a face, a grey beard and a lank cheek.

"Who's there?" quavered a voice. "We are good Nationals here; we showed the tricolour since dawn, I assure you, soldier!"

"You are in no danger," whispered Ludovica. "But here are two homeless children whose parents have been killed . . . I entreat you, if you are human, give them shelter for the night!"

"Are you a woman?" asked the old man, with less terror in his voice.

"Only a woman, Monsieur, who begs pity for two children!"

"Ah! *les pauvres mioches!*" sighed the man, and the little girl suddenly whimpering seemed to decide him.

"Wait," he said, "wait! I go to ask my wife if she will admit them!"

"Be quick! Be quick!" implored Ludovica . . . "If a patrol comes this way . . .!"

The window closed, and Ludovica had to wait what seemed another hour, crouching under the sill, trying to keep the children quiet, dreading each flicker of the conflagration that reached to the house-wall as the possible messenger of death. In one of these gleams, which fortunately did not quite reach the house, she saw with terror, illuminated as by day, the moustachioed face and scarlet *képi* of a Versaillese sentinel, looking over the wall above the bank on the other side of the road, his bayonet ensanguined by the flames. Then the fitful light faded again, and she heard a chain

being gratingly removed. She dragged the children forward, and caught a glimpse behind the door, which was only opened about a foot, of the old man and a woman with a troubled face and black top-knot, standing in the candle-lit passage.

"Take them! Take them!" she whispered frantically, pushing the children through the opening. As she did so, the candle-rays caught the slice of her uniform that could be seen through the slit of the door, and the old man recoiled, dragging the little boy in by the hand.

"A Federal!" he gasped. "*Allez-vous-en! Allez-vous-en!*" and pushed the door to with a little clap . . . But the young ones were inside!

Now she must think for herself again. Terrified by the way the old man had shrunk from her uniform, Ludovica unwisely flung the tunic away in the bushes, forgetting her white chemise would make her a worse mark in the dark. She ran back to the stair by which she had hoped to escape . . . Too late! . . . There was a sentry now at the bottom, plainly visible, and at the same moment as she saw him he challenged her with a peremptory "*Qui vive?*"

She swung round and, bent double, raced—a terrified hare—back along that purgatorial lane, stumbling with fatigue in the ruts, and gasping for breath. At the end where she had stood to watch the fire, she plunged round the corner of the wall and attempted a zigzag rush down the broken slopes. But they were now all illuminated by the crimson carpet of the conflagration, and from the crest where Versailles sentries guarded the cannon another challenge rang out, and without waiting for an answer the man fired at the fluttering white figure . . .

Ludovica went forward on to her knees with a bullet through her lungs; she clutched at a hump in the ground, imploring God to forgive her her sins, and turned over on her back, pillowed against the low mound, her dying eyes fixed upon burning Paris. At that moment an explosion like a cataract of thunder shook the city, as the central Pavilion of the Tuileries, containing the Hall of the Marshals, went up in the detonation of the gun-powder and munitions piled on its lower floor. The sentry who had fired at Ludovica stood aghast overhead, and forgot to come to see the effect of his shot.

For a few seconds she suffocated in agonising pain, and clutched at her stained chemise with her long fingers. Then the pain dulled,

and she had a sensation of being lifted by gentle arms into the air . . . Those children were safe . . . her own child smiled down into her eyes . . . Deodato was holding her hand with the same look as he had shown her at the moment when they first kissed down in the Tuileries gardens . . . He was telling her that everything was well . . .

Now the flames, joined in one sheet, rushed up with a roar that could be heard far and wide over the city. They seemed to open a gulf into which Paris, with its monuments, its history, its art, its culture and its riches, was to be sucked as into an incandescent whirlpool. Higher they mounted and higher, spreading like a curtain ready to advance and blot out all that remained of Lutetia's memory. In every street, at every window, the inhabitants stood still ; the skirmishing rifles ceased ; and with the shrieks and moans of the victims in the flames, a sigh of despair passed over the city that had committed suicide.

The red blaze played upon Ludovica's features. Paris was lifting the funeral torch of its own death in homage to the white face with the broad cheek-ridges, the great lids, now falling for the last time over the far-away eyes, the small mouth, open and panting, though its owner did not know it, for a final breath. And the Beata Ludovica returned to marble . . .

* * * * *

ENVOY

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. . . Marble illuminated with a soft rose from the falling sun as the man with the grey-streaked hair who had been sitting for an hour in the chapel rose to bid her good night. Every evening the symbolic parting was like a new death in his heart, but every morning, when the first Mass began, he was present to take new life into his soul.

All over Rome, as he turned to depart, the bells were calling the *Ave Maria*. They echoed through a city that was still, here in Trastevere, a home of dreaming peace, more tranquil indeed than he had ever known it to be. The strained apprehension, the uneasy sense of Revolution muttering within and invasion menacing without, which had haunted the last years of papal rule, had passed away since soldiers wearing the white Cross of Savoy had kept the ward in Rome . . . Spectacle that would have swelled the heart of Ludovica, but which her eyes had never seen ! . . . The Vatican might be a palace of secluded mourning, and in many quarters there might already be disturbing changes—new streets and quarters going gauntly up, gardens felled, factories and railways increasing. There were not enough of these things yet to rob the city of its age-long character, its golden brick, its foliage and its quiet.

It was still the sanctuary for an artist's reveries, a lover's memories. But the prematurely aged man, with his worn face shaded by a grizzling moustache and imperial, who passed down the nave of San Francesco a Ripa on his way back to his studio in the Via Lungara, had the resolute step, the deeply glowing eye of one for whom life still burned with quivering intensity. Some of the first buildings in the new Rome carried his statuary on their cornices ; in the Luxembourg Gardens his *Paris aux abois* slowed the steps of passers-by with its reminder of a justice still to be done in the name of civilisation ; even under the distant smoke of London

an interlaced Pan and Nymph of his collected soot in a grim patrician courtyard.

But Deodato let his winged thoughts travel over the globe with their own message, and was content to allow the garlands of his fame to lie ungathered in the capitals of Europe. His true life was a secret flame—a passion that aspired and reached its object through a mask of marble, a communion with an Ideal that gleamed through all the powers of Nature as the token of Divinity. What he saw he must communicate in its solemn joy and splendour. That vision, that task would suffice for him, living solitary as a monk, frugal as a labourer, in his silent corner of Rome; until the call should come for him, too, to push aside the veil, and meet his other soul where stone again returned to spirit.

In the portico of the little church a youthful officer in the pale-blue mantle of the Italian cavalry was gently wrestling for a touch from the hands of a girl who turned her face away from him towards the pillars. The man with the greying beard smiled as he went down the steps into the square.

THE END

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